

AMBROSE'S TEACHING AND EXEMPLARS ON THE VIRTUES OF PRUDENCE AND FORTITUDE AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Every generation encounters moral problems. Thus, designing an ethical standard or a moral guide for any generation has been a major concern for great minds who believe in a genuine pursuit of happiness through virtuous life. Ancient philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics debated on this in their time by acknowledging essential virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance as moral principles. Marcus Aurelius Cicero followed the moral principles of these ancient Greek philosophers and, to encourage young Romans aspiring for leadership positions, wrote a book titled *De Officiis*, a handbook on duty and responsibility. Ambrose of Milan, a statesman turned churchman, who also studied the pagan virtues of these Greek philosopher and the work of Cicero, wrote *De Officiis Ministrorum*, a handbook on duty for clergy, religious, and Christians of his diocese. Ambrose adopted and adapted the pagan virtues into Christian virtues. The virtues of prudence and courage are critical virtues among the cardinal virtues that Ambrose analyzed in his work using biblical exemplars as models for Christians of his time. The current situation in Nigeria needs a reconsideration as corruption and other moral vices have occupied the central stage in Nigeria. Highlighting Ambrose's virtue theory and teaching on prudence and courage as part of daily catechesis and homily will be necessary for the development of moral consciousness and values among the Christians and non-Christians in Nigeria. This work traces the historical development of virtue theory from ancient times to the time of Ambrose. It uses historical analysis to bring forward the Christian virtues taught by Ambrose and their exemplars, and argues for emulation of these tremendous biblical exemplars and suggests modern and local exemplars from the Nigerian perspective and Africa at large.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Ambrose of Milan was born “in Trier, on the banks of the Mosel River in present-day Germany, probably in 399,”¹ into an aristocratic Roman family. His father, Aurelius Ambrosius, was a praetorian prefect of Gaul, and his mother, from a renowned family, was well known for her piety and life of discipline. Ambrose, who was trained in rhetoric and law, later studied Greek as a young man. Having finished school, Ambrose “left Rome to practice law under the praetorian prefect Sextus Anicius Petronius Probus.”² Being impressed with Ambrose's wisdom, commitment, and services, Sextus appointed him his legal adviser and later raised the young Ambrose to the rank of *consular*, after which, Ambrose was made a governor of Liguria and Aemilia. He was the governor of Aemilia-Liguria centered in Milan when he was unanimously elected a bishop of Milan in 374. Ambrose as a bishop waged strong opposition to Arianism and, as a mediator, made efforts to reconcile emperor Theodosius I and Magnus Maximus over some disagreements and conflicts. This outstanding preacher played a significant role in fourth-century Christianity between 339 AD and 397 AD. Among his many works are *De paradiso* (377-378), which was probably his first work. In the *De paradiso*, Ambrose identifies “the garden of Eden with the paradise which St Paul speaks of in 2 Cor. 12:4.”³ *Exameron* (386-390) and *De Obitu Theodosii* (395) are considered among his most noted works.

¹ Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose*, Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge, 1997), 16.

² Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 18.

³ Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 56.

Ambrose's work *De Officiis Ministrorum*, is "probably the best known of all Ambrose's writings, [although] there is no general agreement as to when it was composed."⁴ Boniface Ramsey in addition argues that *De Officiis Ministrorum* was modeled after Cicero's *De Officiis*.

Ambrose uses Cicero's *De officiis* as his model, following it closely but Christianizing it by, among other things, regular references to Scripture. Like Cicero's treatise, Ambrose's is in three books: The first deals with the good and the appropriate (*honestum ac decorum*), particularly the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance; the second with the useful or the utilitarian (*utile*); and the third with a comparison between the two in which it is shown that the good must always be chosen over what is merely useful.⁵

One of the notable things Ambrose did in the history of Christianity was the adoption and adaptation of the pagan virtues into Christian virtues. Before the Christian era, ancient philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics had developed ethical ideas and virtue theories that dominated the academic atmosphere of the ancient world. However, these moral teachings and ethical theories were based on philosophy and pagan tradition. Ambrose of Milan, having studied the pagan virtues in ancient philosophy, not only adopted them but also adapted them into Christian ethics. The major questions for us will be: How did Ambrose adapt these pagan virtues into Christian virtues and what difference did it make? And how relevant is Ambrose's teaching on the cardinal virtues to the contemporary Christians of Nigeria?

This thesis, while discussing the virtue theory of Ambrose, will focus on the virtues of prudence and fortitude (courage). The choice of prudence in this thesis is not only because it is the first cardinal virtue but also because prudence entails serious deliberation, practical reason and it is connected to the other virtues. As Ambrose puts it, prudence "consists in the knowledge of the truth."⁶ Thomas Aquinas, who came many years after Ambrose, describes prudence as that which

⁴ Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 60.

⁵ Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 60.

⁶ Ambrose, *De Officiis*, trans. Ivor J. Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 185

“is of good counsel about matters regarding man’s entire life, and the end of human life.”⁷ This means is nothing but the process of discovering the truth. The choice of fortitude or courage in this work is because fortitude is not just a special virtue but is also rated highly by Ambrose among other virtues. In addition, Ambrose describes courage as “greatness of spirit that is evident too in physical strength.”⁸ Aquinas in the medieval era describes courage explicitly as the virtue which “guards the will against being withdrawn from the good of reason through fear of bodily evil.”⁹ In addition, the virtue is “chiefly fear about difficulties, which can withdraw the will from following the reason. And it behooves one not only firmly to bear the assault of these difficulties by restraining fear, but moderately to withstand them.”¹⁰ In exploring these two great virtues and exemplars from the Christian tradition highlighted by Ambrose, the Christians in Nigeria who are currently faced with the evil of corruption, greed, materialism, Boko Haram and other vices should be able to confront this evil with wisdom (prudence) and courage by putting into practice Ambrose’s teaching on virtues. However, Christians in Nigeria in attempt to act courageously must also do that moderately to avoid unnecessary risks and dangers.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to explore in depth Ambrose's teaching on virtues with particular attention to the virtue of fortitude and prudence. The thesis will also compare and contrast the ethical teaching of Cicero on virtues with that of St Ambrose. This work will show that Ambrose uses biblical exemplars in contrast with the pagan classical exemplars of Cicero to argue for the superiority of the biblical exemplars. The introductory chapter begins with the background of St Ambrose and his works, particularly that of *De Officiis*. The second part of the

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II q. 57, a. 4 in vol. 2, rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948), 381.

⁸ Ambrose, *De Officiis*, 185.

⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 123, a. 4 in vol. 3 (1703).

¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 123, a. 3 in vol. 3 (1703).

introductory chapter will highlight recent research and scholarship on Ambrose's teaching on virtues (*status quaestionis*) and explore their divergent views and understanding of Ambrose's works. One basic fact on the scholarship of Ambrose is the complexity around his status and writings; are we dealing with Ambrose the philosopher, the statesman, the pastor, or Ambrose the theologian? While all of these roles influence his writings, in his virtue theory, Ambrose's view and focus were well articulated.

The second chapter deals specifically with classical and biblical virtue theory. It traces virtue theory from Socrates and Plato to Aristotle and then focuses on Cicero's teaching of the virtues of fortitude (courage) and prudence with his exemplars in view. I then explore the biblical concept and Christian sources of virtue with a focus on the virtues of fortitude and prudence. In addition, some exemplars from the biblical and Judeo-Christian traditions will be discussed and analyzed. I will argue that some exemplars like Abraham, Joseph and Judith demonstrate very well the virtue of courage while Jacob, David and Solomon demonstrate the virtue of prudence more dynamically. These exemplars are not as abstract as those of philosophical and Greco-Roman exemplars in virtue theory.

Chapter three focuses on Ambrose's virtue theory with specific attention to the virtues of fortitude and prudence. Ambrose's concept and understanding of the virtues of fortitude and prudence will be examined with corresponding exemplars to demonstrate their superiority over those of Cicero and the pagan exemplars.

Chapter four of this work focuses on the application of Ambrose's virtue theory among Christians in Nigeria. It is a fact beyond reasonable doubt that present-day Christianity in Nigeria lacks the courage to confront some of the evils befalling its society. The inability of most Christians to face the truth and fight for justice has created a vacuum in the Christian fold. Thus, returning to

the early teachings of St Ambrose, specifically his doctrine on the virtues of fortitude and prudence, and encouraging Christians to practice those virtues will go a long way to changing evil situations in the world. The goal of Christianity is to fight evil as children of light and not to condone it.

1.2 Status *Quaestionis*: Recent Research and Scholarship on Ambrose

The significance and controversies surrounding the writings and the teachings of Ambrose of Milan have created great interest in research and scholarship. Ambrose of Milan no doubt occupied a central position in fourth-century Christianity. His many roles, ranging from “Ambrose the ecclesiastical statesman, Ambrose the pastor, Ambrose the Trinitarian theologian, Ambrose the practical ethicist, Ambrose the pure and simple fideist, Ambrose the synthesizer of classicism and Christianity,”¹¹ have also exposed him to serious scrutiny and criticism. Besides, Ambrose's complex pedagogy left many scholars wondering if he was writing as a theologian or a philosopher, a Christian or a pagan, a statesman or an ethicist. Marcia Colish says that “It is obvious that there is a notable lack of consensus on what is important about Ambrose or even on what he was truly like as a person, a thinker, and a bishop.”¹² However, Ambrose's numerous contributions to the Roman Church through his writings and teachings cannot be overlooked. Thus, “recent scholarship has prompted renewed interest in his achievements in other areas: as a theologian he helped to clarify the status and articulation of Nicene orthodoxy in the Roman West.”¹³ There is no competition for Ambrose's reputation and influence in his time. Ambrose's "reputation as an effective pastor, made famous through Augustine's account of Ambrose's role in his return to the

¹¹ Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 5.

¹² Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 5.

¹³ Brian P. Dunkle, *Ambrose of Milan: Treatises on Noah and David* (Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11qdwgt>.

Christian faith, has inspired a range of studies on his preaching and catechesis and catechesis."¹⁴ The fact is that there are many factors to look out for about the works of Ambrose; among these factors are his audience, time of writing, and social-cultural and political context. Marcia Colish maintains that "this question of audience is, in fact, central to an understanding of the argument of each of the Patriarch treatises and to that of the four treatises considered as a group. The question of the audience also explains why Ambrose chose to convey his message by reflecting on the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and in the particular medium he selected."¹⁵ One other area to consider in Ambrose's works is "his appeal to other philosophical traditions, notably Aristotelianism and Stoicism, and his highly nuanced understanding of the ways in which the anthropology and ethics of these schools harmonize with biblical anthropology and ethics."¹⁶ There was also a blend of classical literature and Roman law with that of Christianity.

There are divergent views and tensions regarding Ambrose's theology and the combination of different traditions and philosophers which have led to many scholars arguing that Ambrose is un-original. However, "recent scholarship has treated the tension between these divergent views of Ambrose's theology with care and subtlety."¹⁷ Of course, Ambrose's debt to his sources may be a consequence of someone of his caliber, who has a good grasp of Greek language and writings, and is trained and grounded in western civilization and rhetoric. Thus, "we understand better that Ambrose drew deeply from both Greek and Latin authorities, a practice that, in truth, influenced the tradition of Western biblical interpretation."¹⁸ Besides, there is no doubt that Ambrose uses some of his insights to address social and political issues of his time.

¹⁴ Dunkle, *Ambrose of Milan: Treatises on Noah and David*, 3.

¹⁵ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 2.

¹⁶ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 2.

¹⁷ Dunkle, *Ambrose of Milan: Treatises on Noah and David*, 4.

¹⁸ Dunkle, *Ambrose of Milan: Treatises on Noah and David*, 5.

The significant question about Ambrose's work particularly on his ethical teachings is how much pagan or philosophical influence exists in his works. Warren Smith opines that "in the history of Ambrosian scholarship, the relationship between Ambrose's theology and ethics, and the influence of pagan moral philosophy on it, have become intertwined."¹⁹ In the first half of the twentieth century "the question of Ambrose's reliance upon classical and Hellenistic sources was of minimal concern among Ambrose's commentators."²⁰ The emphasis at that time was on Ambrose as a churchman and a leader: "consequently, little time was devoted to the significance of philosophy for Ambrose's theology and ethics."²¹ Probably "the first significant studies of Ambrose's use of philosophical sources came in the works of Pierre Courcelle and Pierre Hadot."²² Ambrose's reliance on pagan philosophy is obvious; this is glaring and noticeable in his virtue theory. Hadot for instance "demonstrated the direct parallels between passages from the *Phaedo*, *Enneads* 1.1, 1.7, and 1.8, and Porphyry's *De regressu animae* and passages in Ambrose's treatises *De Isaac* and *De bono mortis*."²³ In a similar fashion, in Ambrose's work *De Officiis Ministrorum*, there are noticeable parallels with Cicero's *De Officiis*. Marcia Colish in her work on Ambrose points out that "the earliest and the most longstanding historiographical debate that affected the interpretation of Ambrose's patriarch treatises is a confessionally motivated one that began in the age of the Protestant reformation, that was revived in the nineteenth century by Adolf von Harnack, and that survives to this day as the debate over 'Hellenization' in Ambrose and in the early church more generally."²⁴ In addressing the question of "Hellenization" in Ambrose we have to look at the two aspects of Hellenization: "one is the use of forms, language, and substance of Greek

¹⁹ Warren J. Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12.

²⁰ Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtues*, xii.

²¹ Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtues*, xii.

²² Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtues*, xii.

²³ Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtues*, xii.

²⁴ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 6.

philosophy. The other... refers to the practice of biblical allegories, viewed as a subterfuge for incorporating elements from the pagan mystery cults of late antiquity into Christianity.”²⁵ Having accused Ambrose of Hellenization, some authors started a debate on Ambrose’s legitimization of Hellenization. Among the authors who view “Hellenization as a falling away from *scriptura sola* fideism, some place Ambrose on the side of biblicism, claiming that he expressly rejected classicism in its favor; others accuse him of muddying its pure stream, especially by labelling the rites of Christian initiation as ‘mysteries’ and by introducing allegories into Latin biblical exegesis.”²⁶ There are others like the historians of the Milanese liturgy, who argued that “Ambrose, like other early co-religionists, distinguished quite clearly between Christian rites and those of the pagan mystery cults.”²⁷ Besides, “the historians of exegesis have observed that the term ‘mystery’ is biblical and that the many figures of speech and parables that abound in the text made allegorical exegesis look perfectly legitimate and scriptural in the eyes of Ambrose.”²⁸

In contrast to those who present the influence of Greek philosophy on Ambrose as a way of discrediting Ambrose's originality and writings, a new formulation that emerges from the pragmatic perspective invoked the language of the sociology of religion: "The clothing of Christian doctrine in Greek philosophical language during the patristic period, we are told, should best be understood as enculturation, a process the church has had to undergo repeatedly over time in order to make its teachings comprehensible to people living in diverse cultural and historical settings."²⁹ For the school of thought that claims that Ambrose's reliance on philosophical sources suggests that Ambrose lacks originality, the response to them is that Ambrose, by following ancient

²⁵ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 6.

²⁶ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 6.

²⁷ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 6.

²⁸ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 6.

²⁹ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 7 (quoting Lutz-Bachmann, *Hellenisierung des Christentums?*).

philosophers like Socrates, Aristotle, Philo, and others, made his work unique and valuable. For example, "it is precisely because Ambrose's text generally follows Philo so closely that the bishop of Milan's unique contributions stand-out: in those moments where Ambrose diverges from or otherwise alters his source, we spot a creative thinker at work."³⁰ Goulven Madec, in his work *Saint Ambroise et la Philosophie*, "offers perhaps the most sweeping account of the philosophical sources Ambrose alludes to or quotes from in his writing. However, Madec shares Hadot's doubts about the significance of these sources, for despite the many quotations from Plato, Cicero, Plotinus, and others, Ambrose's attitude toward pagan philosophy is at best, ambivalent, and his interest in philosophical arguments themselves seems only minimal."³¹ It is most likely that Ambrose gained most of his knowledge of the philosophers from his studies of the Cappadocian Fathers. Andrew Lenox-Conyngham shares the views of Hadot and Madec that philosophical sources had limited influence on Ambrose; he "contends that readers must take seriously Ambrose's open criticism of moral philosophers, even in a text like *De Officiis*, which is transparently modeled on Cicero's work by that name."³² Ambrose's position should not come as a surprise to those familiar with his work since he was greatly influenced by Origen. For Origen held that Christians "should be cautiously selective in their appropriation of elements of classical culture."³³ And, Ambrose was a strong proponent of this teaching.

In sum, one fact that is indisputable about Ambrose as stated by Boniface Ramsey is that he "played a dominant role in Western Christianity."³⁴ Among the church fathers of Ambrose's time, Ambrose's works in general are regarded as being straightforward and practical. In terms of

³⁰ Dunkle, *Ambrose of Milan: Treatises on Noah and David*, 11.

³¹ Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*, xii.

³² Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*, xiii.

³³ Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*, xiii.

³⁴ Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 1.

biblical exegesis and Ambrose's interpretation, one must put into context the difference between our age and that of Ambrose in the treatment of the scriptures. Ancient authors were interested in "the deeper spiritual meaning of a given text, the meaning that lay below the surface and that might have been hidden from the human author himself."³⁵ So, "this deeper, spiritual meaning may usually be referred to as allegory, and the stress that the ancients laid upon it is complementary to the stress that they laid upon the invincible, spiritual world. Ambrose was an accomplished practitioner of allegory." It is for this reason that we find a lot of "mystery" and deep spiritual interpretations in Ambrose's biblical exegesis and even in his catechesis. In summary, Ambrose's work must be studied and understood from the *sitz im leben* of Ambrose's time.

³⁵ Ramsey, *Ambrose*, 4.

Chapter Two

2.1 Ancient Virtue Theories of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle Cicero; with focus on Exemplars of Prudence and Fortitude

The first chapter of this work gave the background of Ambrose of Milan and his interest in developing the ancient virtue theory for the Christians of his time. This chapter will give an account of the virtue theories of the ancient Greek philosophers and that of Cicero. It is interesting to note that virtue ethics is not alien to human existence as many ancient thinkers and philosophers have had conversations on virtues prior to the time of Socrates. However, Socrates was known to have developed the virtue theory to great extent as affirmed by Plato in his *Republic* since Socrates did not leave any writing or work behind. The truth is that every generation tries to develop virtue theory for its own people. Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, addressed their virtue theories to the Greeks or the Athenians; therefore, their exemplars were built around the ancient Greek heroes and heroines. The same goes for Cicero, whose exemplars were those of Roman civilization. Having said that, it is good to begin the analysis of virtue by looking into the root meaning of the word virtue. Etymologically, the word virtue is from the Latin word “*vir*” which means man or “manliness,” it could also mean valor, which can be referred to as “humanness,” bearing in mind the use of inclusive language. In the Greek language, the word *arête* which translates as virtue means excellence. Thus, a virtuous person is a person who is in a state of excellence, has good character, or is morally sound. Having looked at the etymological concept of virtue, it is good also to note that before Christianity, ancient philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle developed ethical ideas and virtue theories that dominated the academic atmosphere of the ancient world. Their ethical theories and ideas were based on pagan traditions and philosophical theory.

2.1.1 Socrates

Socrates began a new debate on the question of the "good life" and the true meaning of happiness at the center of philosophical inquiries. Thus, for Socrates, true happiness is embedded in a virtuous act that emanates from reason and knowledge. He opines that virtue should not be defined in the abstract, rather, "virtues are to be understood as kinds of practical knowledge – hence the Socratic slogan, 'virtue is knowledge' – that cause and explain virtuous action, and that virtue is the health and good condition of the soul that decisively contributes to human happiness or *eudaimonia*."³⁶ In his ethical teaching on the unity of virtues, Socrates mentions the four primary virtues, which are wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Among these virtues, wisdom plays a unique role as a primary virtue that connects all others. He says that it is only when we have true knowledge of the good, without error that we can act rightly. If we can act rightly and reasonably then we achieve the ultimate good which is happiness. The ability to know what is good is, for Socrates, wisdom which he calls *Sophia*. It is in possessing this virtue of wisdom (*Sophia*) and acting wisely that we become good. Therefore, "if virtue is something good and something which makes us good, and all good things are advantageous, then virtue must be advantageous."³⁷ Socrates named some characteristics and qualities that are associated with virtue if they are used properly; health, strength, beauty, quickness of mind, memory, nobility of character, self-control, justice and courage. Socrates however, notes that "these qualities are only beneficial or advantageous when they are used rightly, and if not used rightly can bring harm."³⁸ He argues

³⁶ Franco V. Trivignano, "Plato," in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, ed. Nancy E. Snow (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 89.

³⁷ Karen R. Bell, "The Concept of Virtue and Virtue Based Ethics: Plato, Aristotle, and Macintyre" (Kansas: PhD Dissertation, University of Kansas, U.M.I 1986), 18.

³⁸ Bell, "The Concept of Virtue and Virtue Ethics," 19.

further that one's ability to discern and be well guided by reason on how to use this quality is what leads to the ultimate good.

2.1.2 Plato

Plato was also interested in looking at the relationship between human virtue (*arête*) and happiness (*eudaimonia*). He believes that the good life comes from virtuous living, which in turn leads to happiness. He equally believes that virtuous acts come from wisdom, and wisdom is considered by him also as a primary virtue. Plato, like Socrates, tries to make a distinction between wisdom and knowledge. He pushes his distinction between wisdom and knowledge further by clarifying that wisdom is beyond just the state of mind having a perfect knowledge of everything; it requires critical thinking, such thinking that enables one to make a good judgement of what one perceives or knows. Plato therefore, “described how the human mind achieves knowledge, and indicated what knowledge consists of, by means of his allegory of the cave, his metaphor of the divided line, and his doctrine of the forms.”³⁹ Plato holds that “knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for guiding oneself in the right direction, choosing to act, and acting in ways that move one in the right direction towards happiness.”⁴⁰ Plato like his predecessors acknowledges the significant role of knowledge in virtue theory. For him, “central to the task of becoming a virtuous individual is attaining knowledge of the cardinal virtues: these are initially piety, courage, temperance, justice and wisdom, though in the Republic piety is left out.”⁴¹ Plato further proposes that the cardinal virtues are inherent and rooted in human nature and that those virtues are

³⁹ Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy*, Third Edition (New York: McGraw- Hill Book Company, 1982), 49.

⁴⁰ Bell, “The Concept of Virtue and Virtue Based Ethics,” 62.

⁴¹ Trivignano, “Plato” in *Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, 88.

intrinsically embedded in our souls. He argues that “the understanding of human soul is essential in all classical understanding of the doctrine of virtue.”⁴² Therefore, Plato suggests the soul;

contains not only a rational element (which is consistent with a strict Socratic perspective) but also the irrational parts. The spirited and appetitive irrational inclinations underlie the basis for the platonic distinction between the virtues of courage and moderation; these two virtues correspond directly to the proper regulation of the two irrational aspects of the soul according to platonic thought.⁴³

Plato in addition to his adoption of Socratic virtue theory and the cardinal virtues was able to establish that it is inherent in human beings to act correctly and be happy but this can only be achieved through the knowledge of the good. This knowledge can only be achieved through critical reasoning (wisdom) and judgement, noting that the soul plays a significant role in this judgement. Plato, like Socrates, believes that the gods do not necessarily control human actions but we do, through knowledge and the discipline of our mind.

2.1.3 Aristotle

Aristotle began his virtue theory by connecting intellectual virtues with practical virtues. He states that virtue “is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”⁴⁴ He went further to explain that “practical wisdom must be a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods.”⁴⁵ Aristotle's virtue theory is not different from those of his predecessors. Aristotle declares that “the rational soul has the power of scientific thought... which is the power of analysis, ... the power of deliberation,”⁴⁶

⁴² Douglas Commodore Fortner, “The Doctrine of Virtue in the Philosophical Writing of Lucius Annaeus Seneca” (PhD. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 2002), 29.

⁴³ Fortner, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 30.

⁴⁴ Douglas J. Den Uyl, *The Virtue of Prudence* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), 63 (quoting Nicomachean Ethics II, 1107a1-3).

⁴⁵ Uyl, *The Virtue of Prudence*, 64 (quoting NE 1104b20).

⁴⁶ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 95.

that guides human behavior. The irrational part “is composed of two subparts, the vegetative and the desiring or ‘appetitive’ parts, these are ‘something contrary to the rational principle, resisting and opposing it.’”⁴⁷ For Aristotle, the irrational part is what causes problems of morality. Aristotle stretches beyond the four primary virtues postulated by Socrates and Plato by admitting a multitude of virtues grounded in the intellectual virtue of prudence. Therefore, “in addition to the moral virtues of courage, moderation, and justice ...enumerates a multitude of virtues,”⁴⁸ which are liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, truthfulness, and wisdom. Aristotle, “was acquainted with the cardinal virtues. He did not employ the idea of classification or categorization of the cardinal virtues, rather, he holds that the cardinal virtues are connected, they formed part of the total picture of the virtuous life so that alongside *Sapientia* (wisdom), there appeared *prudentia*, fortitude and *Justitia*, as well as *temperantia* and generosity, high mindedness, and gentleness of character.”⁴⁹ Virtue according to him is a state of character or habit, which is a second nature of humans that can be acquired over time with constant practice. Aristotle argues that human actions are tailored toward the end, which is the ultimate good or happiness. For us to achieve this happiness, rational power has to play the role of reasoning and deliberation through critical thinking. Thus, the cardinal virtues set the standard for measuring human actions. He equally believes in the unity of the virtues; for him, none of these virtues stands alone; they are connected but unique in characteristics. For example, one cannot be said to possess the virtue of fortitude or courage if he or she is not prudent because one needs wisdom and proper guidance to avoid unnecessary risk and danger.

⁴⁷ Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 98.

⁴⁸ Fortner, “The Doctrine of Virtue” 30.

⁴⁹ Fortner, “The Doctrine of Virtue,” 30.

2.2 Cicero: The Virtue of Prudence and Fortitude and Exemplars

Marcus Tullius Cicero, a Roman statesman, lawyer, and philosopher from a wealthy municipal family studied the virtue theory of the Greeks. He adopted and adapted the ethical theories of Aristotle and the Stoics into the Roman culture using Roman exemplars as models for moral teaching to the young minds of the Roman world. Cicero's practical approach of virtue theory is demonstrated in his work *De Officiis* which means "On Duties." Among his many works and writings are *Academica*, *De oratore*, *De re publica*, and *De Natura Deorum*. Cicero's *De Officiis* "had an important impact on the meaning and usage of *virtus* (virtue)," ⁵⁰ because he gave a new meaning to the Latin word *virtus* which typically translates to mean "manliness" to now mean "decorum" which also translates to "that which is just right," or proper.

Cicero began his treatise on duty, addressed to his son Marcus, by stating explicitly that "no phase of life, whether public or private, whether in business or the home, whether one is working on what concerns oneself alone or dealing with another, can be without moral duty; on the discharge of such duties depends on all that is morally right, and on their neglect all that is morally wrong in life." ⁵¹ He went further to classify what duty is by making a distinction between "absolute" duty, which he also called "right" and "mean" duty, which is "duty for the performance of which an adequate reason may be rendered." ⁵² In attempting to look at actions that are considered morally right or wrong, the major question might be: suppose we find ourselves in the situation of a conflict between actions both of which are considered morally right but we have to make a choice? The question then becomes "which one is morally better; and likewise, when a

⁵⁰ Fortner, "The Doctrine of Virtue," 333.

⁵¹ Cicero, *On Duty (De Officiis)*, trans. Walker Miller (New York: W. Heinemann; The Macmillan Co., 1913), 2.

⁵² Cicero, *On Duty*, 3.8.

choice of two expedients is offered, which one is more expedient?"⁵³ Invariably, virtue, therefore, represents that which is morally excellent and proper.

Cicero clarifies what "Moral Goodness" is by establishing the fact that human beings, naturally desire the knowledge of the supreme good, that this desire is controlled by reason, and that this reason relates to two levels; the intellect and the appetite. Cicero submits that human actions are guided by either the intellect or the appetite. The appetite is on the lower and the material level while the intellect is on a higher level, which is guided by critical thinking and wisdom. Cicero, following the virtue theory of the ancient philosophers, therefore, suggests that "moral right rises from one of four sources."⁵⁴ These four sources he considered principal virtues; "that which is concerned either with the full perception and intelligent development of the true"⁵⁵ is prudence or wisdom. And that which is concerned "with the conservation of organized society, with rendering to every man his due, and with the faithful discharge of obligations assumed"⁵⁶ is justice. The one which is concerned "with the greatness and strength of a noble and invincible spirit"⁵⁷ is fortitude, courage or magnanimity. The virtue is which is concerned "with the orderliness and moderation of everything that is said and done, wherein consist temperance and self-control."⁵⁸ Cicero also agrees that these four virtues are connected and interwoven. It is by analyzing and defining each of them that we see from where certain kinds of moral duties have derived their source or origin. Under each of these virtues, Cicero demonstrates what was demanded and needed by the people of his time, including the youth who desired fame and had honorable ambitions, and whom he encouraged to practice these virtues daily. In attempting to

⁵³ Cicero, *On Duty*, 4.

⁵⁴ Cicero, *On Duty*, 5.

⁵⁵ Cicero, *On Duty*, 5.

⁵⁶ Cicero, *On Duty*, 5.

⁵⁷ Cicero, *On Duty*, 5.

⁵⁸ Cicero, *On Duty*, 5.

discuss the virtues of prudence and fortitude, it is important to affirm that regardless of the uniqueness of each virtue, “to have one of the human virtues, where the term ‘virtue’ is carefully and strictly applied, means that you have to have all the rest as well.”⁵⁹ This means for example that one cannot be courageous and be imprudent at the same time and be regarded as a virtuous person. The above position, which is the position of some of the ancient philosophers and theologians, remains the ground from which we delve into exploring these two great virtues, beginning from the virtue of prudence and its exemplars.

2.2.1 Prudence

Cicero began his virtue theory with the four sources of goodness, and among these sources he considered prudence the first and foremost. This is because prudence which he also calls wisdom deals with discovering the truth and being guided by the truth. The key word in Cicero’s virtue of prudence is “truth.” The second important fact is his claim that “the human mind is the highest faculty of man.”⁶⁰ And, having established the above fact, “it is natural, therefore, to suppose that man’s happiness is bound up with the activity proper to the human mind: searching and possessing the truth.”⁶¹ This activity, according to Cicero, is to be regulated by prudence. Complications and difficulties emerge from Cicero’s classification of the virtue of prudence, and these difficulties should be clarified for a better understanding of the virtue of prudence. First of all, Cicero gave two names to one virtue as wisdom and prudence: Is wisdom the same as prudence? The second problem is his claim that it is the work of prudence to search after truth and discover it. Isn’t it the function of the human intellect to search for truth and discover it? And if that be the case, how do we reconcile the fact that most people discover the truth yet they are not

⁵⁹ John M. Cooper, “The Unity of Virtue,” *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol.15, no 1 (1998), 233.

⁶⁰ Andrew Kim, *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics since Vatican II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 57.

⁶¹ Kim, *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics*, 57.

prudent? Well, the first difficulty will lead us to Cicero's understanding of prudence while the second one will do justice to it by explaining what prudence is.

The influence of Aristotle on Cicero especially on the question of truth and intellect is significant. However, sometimes they differ in their positions on prudence and wisdom. Aristotle made a sharp distinction between wisdom and prudence. Aristotle, who in his ethical theory regarded prudence as one of the intellectual virtues, states that prudence is “truth attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good for human beings”⁶² While wisdom “is the most perfect of the modes of knowledge.”⁶³ Therefore, one can be wise and may not be prudent. On the other hand, for someone to act prudently, such a person should have a good knowledge of the right thing to do for the good of all. The good thing here is that Cicero was not concerned about distinguishing the different meanings of these terms. He was interested in the ethical values and concepts of the terms. However, the virtue of wisdom for him is “what the Greek call *Sophia* whereas Prudence to him means what they call *phronesis* (practical knowledge of things to be sought for and the things to be avoided).”⁶⁴ One could argue, therefore, that Cicero combined the intellectual knowledge of the Greeks with the practical knowledge of the Romans to form his ethical theory, which is geared toward knowing what is morally right and putting it into action. It is also clear that prudence for Cicero means knowledge that guides one to the truth. In *De Officiis*, he states that “of the four divisions which we have made the essential idea of moral goodness, the first consisting in the knowledge of the truth, touches human nature most closely. For we are all attracted and drawn to a zeal for learning and knowing; and we think it is glorious to excel therein, while we count it base and immoral to fall into error, to wander from the truth, to

⁶² Peter Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues* (Rome: Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1955), 68.

⁶³ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 68.

⁶⁴ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 59.

be ignorant, to be led astray."⁶⁵ Cicero certainly does not refer to all kinds of knowledge in the virtue of prudence. Rather, "he expects this knowledge to be true, habitual, moral and practical."⁶⁶ Cicero also highlighted the constituent elements of prudence by suggesting that decisions should not be taken in a haste. In searching for and discovering the truth, time and serious attention should be given to weighing the pieces of evidence within our reach. He advises that in doubt, one needs to consult men of great learning to take a decision. One "must try to avoid accepting as known, what is really unknown."⁶⁷ The special end or aim of prudence mentioned by Cicero, "is to be guiding and driving force of other virtues and activities."⁶⁸ For him, nothing could be more desired or prized than prudence.

One of the exemplars of virtue of prudence demonstrated by Cicero will be that of Atticus, whose original name was Titus Pomponius. He was a citizen of Rome and a good friend of Cicero. He was an Epicurean who, "though not deeply versed in philosophy, he probably realized more nearly than any man whose history we know the ethical ideal of Epicurus himself."⁶⁹ Cicero described him as a man who was "supremely, but judiciously selfish; covetous of pleasure, yet with an aesthetic sense which found pleasure only in things decent, tasteful... he was fond of money, frugal while elegant in his mode of living, with no vices so far as we know, certainly with no costly vices."⁷⁰ He also brought out Atticus' level of wisdom and prudence in relating with friends and others around him, saying, "he had the most winning and attractive manners, a voice of rare sweetness and melody, and conversational powers unsurpassed if equaled, by any man of

⁶⁵ Cicero, *On Duty*, 6.

⁶⁶ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 60.

⁶⁷ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 61.

⁶⁸ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 65.

⁶⁹ Paul A. Boer, ed. *Ethical Writing of Cicero: De Officiis; De Senectute; De Amicitia, and Scipio's Dream*, Andrew P. Peabody, trans. (Boston: Little, Veritatis Splendor Publication, 2014), 241.

⁷⁰ Boer, *Ethical Writing of Cicero*, 241.

his time. He was hospitable, yet without extravagance or ostentation, and his entertainments, first in Athens, and then in Rome, were remarkable as reunions of all that there was of learning, genius, wit, and grace."⁷¹ The figure and characteristics of Atticus given by Cicero depicts a man whose life was worthy of emulation since he was prudent in dealing with people around him and keeping to the moral standard of an average good citizen, decent and upright by Roman standard. Cicero believes Atticus was guided by wisdom. Cicero's exemplar above portrays his idea of wisdom and prudence in his virtue theory, which does not only entail a high level of intelligence but a greater level of practicality.

2.2.2 Fortitude:

Cicero began his theory of fortitude by using two terms to qualify it; the greatness of spirit and strength. However, "his favorite terms for the greatness of spirit are four: *magnitudo*, *excellentia*, *magnanimitas*- greatness, excellence, nobility, largeness of soul. The terms for strength are *robor*, *fortitudo*, *spiritus fortis*, *invincibilis*, *humanas res despiciens*- vigour, fortitude, a strong invincible spirit that overcome earthly attractions."⁷² It is good for these terms to have been mentioned as they could help us to understand what fortitude mean for Cicero. He emphasizes that "that moral goodness which we look for in a lofty, high-minded spirit is secured, of course, by moral, not by physical, strength. And yet the body must be trained and so disciplined that it can obey the dictates of judgment and reason in attending to business and in enduring toil."⁷³ Cicero acknowledged fortitude as one of the sources of moral goodness that "is concerned with greatness and strength of a noble and invincible spirit, it is that which is strong and courageous."⁷⁴ It is good at this point to distinguish between physical fortitude and moral fortitude. Physical fortitude is that

⁷¹ Boer, *Ethical Writing of Cicero*, 242.

⁷² Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 80.

⁷³ Cicero, *On Duty*, 23.

⁷⁴ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 80.

through which "the body must be trained and so disciplined that it can obey the dictates of judgment and reason in attending to business and in enduring toil."⁷⁵ While moral fortitude "depends wholly upon the thought and attention given to it by the mind, that is, it depends upon perfect wisdom."⁷⁶ In summary, Cicero described the virtue of fortitude as the "strength of soul that enables man to pursue moral good recognized by right reason in spite of the greatest difficulties and danger."⁷⁷ The above description of fortitude brings out clearly that for Cicero fortitude goes beyond physical strength to the strength of the soul, that which comes from within, that enables anyone to confront danger even in the face of death.

Before anyone undertakes a courageous act, Cicero admonishes that such a person should consider moral rectitude as the only good. Personal power, pleasure, glory, money, and personal interest must be avoided in being courageous. Even for a social reason and for the common good a brave person must not put his or her interest before that of the state or its citizens. This is because personal glory and interest could end in reckless or unreasonable risks. Cicero finds in Marcus Atilius Regulus a good example, "who; because he had given his word to his captors, returned to most cruel torture. It would seem that this was the case of martyrdom purely for virtue's sake."⁷⁸ Besides, it is a demonstration of moral courage to keep to one's promise or word even at the expenses of one's life if it leads to an ultimate good.

Cicero arguing in favor of greatness of spirit agrees that "the men who in civil capacity direct the affairs of the nation render no less important service than they who conduct its wars: by their statesmanship oftentimes wars are either averted or terminated; sometimes also they are

⁷⁵ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 81.

⁷⁶ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 81.

⁷⁷ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 81.

⁷⁸ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 83.

declared.”⁷⁹ To support his claim, Cicero gave an example of Marcus Cato who through his wise counsel "the Third Punic War was undertaken, and in its conduct, his influence was dominant, even after he was dead.”⁸⁰ Thus, one could be termed courageous not only by going to war but through counseling and guiding others to make wise decisions. Therefore, great intellectual ability that reflects and discovers future danger and tries to avoid such danger will be more acceptable than great personal courage that lacks the knowledge on how to avoid unnecessary risks. On the battlefield or at war, Cicero also warns that if after weighing the circumstances and it is obvious that war is inevitable in achieving a feeling of lasting peace, then, war "should be taken in such a way as to make it evident that it has no other object than to secure peace.”⁸¹ However, Cicero warns that nothing be done with the intention of wickedness, recklessness, or barbarism. His virtue ethics on courage practically leans towards the position of Aristotle on the "mean." He never advocated extreme action.

Cicero’s virtue of fortitude also argues for the need to do things for the public good rather than personal ego, personal honor and vain glory. He stated that “it is our duty, then, to be more ready to endanger our own than the public welfare and to hazard honour and glory more readily than other advantages.”⁸² He gave an exemplar of Callicratidas, a Spartan Admiral in Peloponnesian war, who won many signal successes but lost it at the end for not withdrawing his fleet against Arginusae even when he was advised against his action. He argued that the Spartan could always build another fleet but withdrawing the fleet will be a discredit to his honor. The fleet was lost and the Spartans received the adverse effect. The above is a demonstration of the negative effect of ego and personal glory instead of putting into consideration the good of the public.

⁷⁹ Cicero, *On Duty*, 23-24.

⁸⁰ Cicero, *On Duty*, 24.

⁸¹ Cicero, *On Duty*, 24.

⁸² Cicero, *On Duty*, 25.

Likewise, Cleombrotus for fear of criticism recklessly waged war against Epaminondas, and it led to the final collapse of the Spartan power. This exemplar demonstrates an abuse of power and the act of courage done out of personal honor and recklessness. There are so many good exemplars of courageous people, who demonstrated the greatness of spirit through their leadership; Gaius Laelius who was said to have possessed the characteristics of Socrates, Philip, king of Macedon who was affirmed as great and well-skilled in leadership. One of such exemplar also is that of a man whose life Cicero encourages the young people to admire, Marcus Porcius Cato. He was “persecuted for righteousness sake.”⁸³ Yet stood firm and resolute Cicero described him as someone who “was rigidly truthful, sternly and ferociously upright, intensely courageous, and devotedly patriotic.”⁸⁴ Cato was not only smart, intelligent, and astute but also brave, “in war he was the bravest of soldiers, renowned in many signal conflicts.”⁸⁵ In addition, he was a man of many qualities, such that, “in frugal living, in endurance of labor and of danger, he was of iron constitution of body and mind; nor could old age, which enfeebles all things, break him.”⁸⁶

Finally, there are many reasons why people may pursue virtuous life-style, it could be for “the intrinsic goodness of virtue and consider virtue worth seeking for its own sake, (or) as an end itself.”⁸⁷ The truth is that “no matter which of the three objects is aimed at whether it is a virtue for its own sake, or freedom of spirit, or public welfare, they all demand sacrifices from the whole man, and it is the characteristics of a brave man that he is ready to spare no ‘sweat and blood’, that he proves himself ‘in times of danger and toil,’ that he wants deeds, not fame or great name, deeds

⁸³ Paul A. Boer, ed. *Ethical Writing of Cicero*, 245.

⁸⁴ Boer, *Ethical Writing of Cicero*, 245.

⁸⁵ Boer, *Ethical Writing of Cicero*, 246.

⁸⁶ Boer, *Ethical Writing of Cicero*, 246.

⁸⁷ George Karamanolis, “The Primacy of Virtue: The Transition from *De finibus* to *Tusculanae Disputationes* 5,” in *Cicero Ethicus: Die Tusculanae disputationes im Vergleich mit De finibus bonorum et malorum*, Muller M. Gernit, Muller Jorn, eds. (Germany: Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020), 153.

that are ‘great and in the highest degree useful, but extremely arduous and laborious.’”⁸⁸ This summarizes the kind of fortitude or courage Cicero exposed and advocated for in his virtue theory. Dear to him is the desire to instill in young people the moral courage that assists them in building a Roman Republic, that is free of corruption and injustice, and this requires both military and civic courage.

2.3 Roman and Christian Sources on the Virtue of Prudence and Fortitude.

Cicero’s work was for the citizens of Rome who aspired to serve in public offices while Ambrose’s *De Officiis* was for the clergy and religious of his diocese. His work *De Officiis* gained serious attention among Romans in pursuit of public offices while Ambrose’s work was valuable among the Clergy and Christians of the early church. Both works addressed issues on moral duties and the pursuit of happiness though from different perspective and in different context. For the Christians, while we accept the significant role of Ambrose in Christianizing pagan virtues, nevertheless, the origin of virtue ethics predates Ambrose, it goes far back to the Old Testament scriptures and the teaching of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. Therefore, the bible remains a big source for the Christian’s doctrine of virtue. The virtues of prudence and courage are two great virtues that were modeled and demonstrated through exemplars in the bible especially in the Old Testament. Among the biblical patriarchs like Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and others exist virtues that depict “a character trait that expresses some sort of excellence.”⁸⁹ Proverbs for instance "contain several verses where virtues are presented through familiar images. For example, Proverbs 6:6 urges the reader, ‘go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!’”⁹⁰ In the Christian traditions, there are four cardinal virtues; wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice.

⁸⁸ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 84.

⁸⁹ Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Virtue: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (Oregon: Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 1.

⁹⁰ Vainio, *Virtue*, 4.

However, from St Paul, and “drawing on 1 Cor 13:13, the medieval Christian tradition adds three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love.”⁹¹ These theological virtues exist inherently in the cardinal virtues. For example, for one to act courageously in the face of adversity such a person must have faith in God. the book of Exodus and Deuteronomy (Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21) contain passages where God directs and gives laws to the Israelites on what to avoid if they must remain his people. In Leviticus, the duties and obligations of the priests were spelt out clearly.

In resume, it is good to state clearly that the debate and teachings about virtue is as ancient as human existence. In the ancient Greek world, philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics did justice to this debate from their various points of view and understanding. In the pursuit of happiness, the virtues of prudence/wisdom and courage are among the primary virtues highlighted by the ancient Greek philosophers as guiding principles. Plato opines that this wisdom, beyond knowledge, requires critical thinking and good judgment. Aristotle maintains that knowledge is beyond the physical judgment, a rational soul which has the power of scientific thought, analysis, and power of deliberations, is that which can guide one’s behavior properly and morally. Wisdom and courage are two great virtues that can guide our actions morally and for the common good. Thus, the ancient Greek philosophers uphold that the virtues of wisdom or prudence, fortitude or courage are very important in the pursuit of happiness and ultimate good. Marcus Tullius Cicero studied the virtue theory of the ancient Greek philosophers, and adopted and adapted it for the young Roman citizens aspiring for leadership position. His work *De Officiis* though addressed to his son Marcus is a master piece on duty and virtue. He advocated for that which is morally excellent, proper, and for the common good. He used Roman exemplars to

⁹¹ Vainio, *Virtue*, 3.

demonstrate his virtue theory and encouraged young minds to emulate those exemplars. In Cicero, we find a blend of Greek and Roman ethical teachings. Ambrose of Milan, a statesman and a church patriarch, uses the Cicero's *De Officiis* to address the clergy, religious and Christians of his time using biblical and Christian exemplars as models of moral icons worthy of emulation. He developed a Christian based ethical theories that became a handbook of virtues for the Christians of his time and beyond. In the next chapter we will explore on how Ambrose adapted the pagan virtues of prudence and fortitude into Christian virtues.

Chapter 3

3.0. Ambrose on the Virtue of Prudence and Fortitude; Exemplars.

The introductory chapter of this work gave a brief biography of Ambrose of Milan with a background on how he adopted and adapted the ancient pagan virtues into Christian virtues. The chapter also gave a resume of recent scholarship on Ambrose's virtue theory with an overview of the complexities that surround the composition of his work *De Officiis Ministrorum*. The second chapter was an exposition of the ancient virtue theories of pagan philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Cicero whose works Ambrose had used in proposing an outstanding virtue ethics for the clergy and religious of his diocese. This chapter, therefore, focuses on Ambrose's virtue ethics with specific attention on the virtues of prudence and fortitude. It will highlight Ambrose's concept and understanding of the virtues of prudence and fortitude using corresponding exemplars from the bible to demonstrate the superiority of Christian virtues and exemplars over those of Ancient Philosophers and Cicero.

Before the time of Ambrose, discussion about morality and principal virtues had already begun among Christians and non-Christians, and what we know today as the four cardinal virtues, i.e., prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, were identified by early Christian writers as principal guides for morality. The overview of the ancient virtue theory influenced Ambrose, who, having studied these virtues and Christianized them, gave them prominence within the Christian tradition. The virtues of prudence and fortitude are two important virtues among the cardinal virtues which Ambrose used in representing a practical approach to demonstrate the virtue theory in an exemplary way. Ambrose like the early Christian writers considered these cardinal virtues as principal virtues, which he refers to in Latin as "*virtutes principales*, a designation which until the

twelfth century was actually more customary than the phrase *virtutes cardinales*.”⁹² Tertullian of Carthage for instance wrote an essay on the virtue of patience, and Cicero and Seneca had also written on the virtue of endurance. Therefore, there were certain pieces of writings on different virtues moving around at that time.

The work of Ambrose *De Officiis Ministrorum* is a general treatise on ethics that was addressed to the clergy of Milan. It was written out of Ambrose's commitment to a life of moral discipline, to present the virtue theory in a way that fits into the life of the clergy, religious and Christians of his time. Ambrose's *De Officiis* is a Christian version of Cicero's *De Officiis*: For, “he not only took the title from Cicero's essay, ‘*De Officiis*,’ but also organized his book, as had Cicero, around cardinal virtues. Yet as soon as one moves beyond the introductory paragraphs and looks at Ambrose's discussion of specific virtues as well as at the examples he used to illustrate them, Cicero is displayed by the scriptures.”⁹³ Ambrose's usage of the biblical exemplars besides their moral uprightness also demonstrates the Christian's claim of originality and superiority of its virtue ethics over those of pagans. Clement of Alexandria for instance in accenting the priority of cardinal virtues “suggests that the Greeks learned from the Hebrews.”⁹⁴ The simple truth according to the early Christian writers was that the scripture, specifically the five books of Moses and the prophets predated the writings of the Greeks.

Ambrose's work addresses the concept of duty concerning happiness: The pursuit of happiness for Ambrose should be done not solely for the sake of pleasure but rather for the ultimate good and eternal rewards. Thus, Ambrose's concept of happiness is different from the happiness

⁹² István P. Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages: A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 12.

⁹³ Robert L. Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 279-280.

⁹⁴ Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 279.

(*eudaimonia*) of the Epicureans and Aristotelians. Ambrose links happiness with a virtuous life that is centered on the fear of God. His concept of duty is to do that which is more honorable and that which is more beneficial in each case. Therefore, Ambrose submits that true happiness comes from the fear of the Lord and doing that which is more honorable and advantageous in life. Thus for the Christians, he says: “we have no interest in anything unless it is seemly and honourable, and we measure that by standard of the future, not the present. Nor do we recognize anything to be beneficial unless it helps us attain the grace of eternal life; we do not give this name to the sort of thing which merely contributes to the enjoyment of our present life.”⁹⁵ When Ambrose talks about that which is honorable, he means that which is devoid of any vice or evil. The happiness Ambrose advocates for is not material or worldly, rather it is that which is geared toward eternal life. Therefore, he tries to make his clergy understand that if the pagan philosophers could have standard ethical values, so much more should Christians have them. If the pagans practice moral discipline for earthly rewards and happiness how much more should the Christians who are supposedly doing that for eternal rewards and happiness? To make his message clearer Ambrose will use biblical figures and patriarchs as perfect models and exemplars for Christians of his time, and he encourages them to imitate them by practicing the virtues these people practiced. While the patriarchs have demonstrated different virtues, the focus will be on prudence and fortitude and how Ambrose used exemplars from the Bible and encouraged Christians to imitate these exemplars.

3.1. Prudence and Exemplars.

The virtue of prudence is counted as first and foremost by Ambrose among the cardinal virtues. He defines wisdom (*sapientia*), which is his preferred term for *prudentia*, as that “which

⁹⁵ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 133.

makes us seek the truth and instills in us a yearning for ever deeper knowledge.”⁹⁶ Ambrose equates this deeper knowledge called wisdom with the fear of God. Ambrose further submits that “the first source of duty, therefore, is prudence.”⁹⁷ And that this virtue of prudence, “is also the source from which all the other virtues derive.”⁹⁸ Even though Ambrose seemingly got the idea of virtue theory from the pagan philosophers, his understanding of wisdom is different from those of the philosophers since he did not only define wisdom as the discovering of truth but linked wisdom with the fear of God. Ambrose categorically stated that God is the source of all knowledge and truth. This account for the reason why he asked this important question; “how can anyone be called wise if he does not fear his God? For the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).”⁹⁹ Thus, for Ambrose, “prudence or wisdom is identified with knowing God and hence with faith. If one does not know God and trust him one cannot be wise, that is, possess the virtue of prudence.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, to be prudent is to be wise.

Having established that to be prudent is to be wise, Ambrose, therefore, submits that “prudence certainly came first in the life of holy Abraham.”¹⁰¹ Thus, Abraham became the first exemplar used by Ambrose to demonstrate the true nature of the virtue of prudence. Ambrose says that the scriptures testified about Abraham: “‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ No one can be called prudent who does not know the Lord. It is the fool who has said, ‘There is no God’, for no wise person could ever say such a thing.”¹⁰² Having identified prudence as a primary virtue in Abraham, Ambrose singled out faith a theological virtue Abraham

⁹⁶ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*. trans. 185.

⁹⁷ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*. trans. 191.

⁹⁸ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*. trans. 191.

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*. trans. 185.

¹⁰⁰ Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 280.

¹⁰¹ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 185.

¹⁰² Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 185.

had from the beginning that made him unique and disposed to learn and master the other cardinal virtues. The faith of Abraham played a significant role in his relationship with God.

Ambrose argues that virtues such as prudence or courage could be acquired or learned but faith is a gift from God and it was inherent in Abraham. Ambrose opines that “Abraham possesses faith from the start.”¹⁰³ And he was consistent in his faith and trust in God beginning from his call by God to leave his country of birth. Even though *De Officiis* is not on faith it is good to mention here that besides the cardinal virtues, there are theological virtues or Christian virtues that serve as spring boards or nursery beds for the cardinal virtues to operate with. It is the faith Abraham had in God that made him obey God’s commandment to leave his land of birth, and it is in obeying God’s word that he discovered the wisdom of God, the Truth.

While Ambrose, typically did not base his virtues theory on Abraham’s faith, it is almost impossible to discuss Abraham’s demonstration of prudence and fortitude without making reference to his faith in God. Robert Louis Wilken links faith with wisdom by submitting that “wisdom or prudence is identified with knowing God and hence with faith. If one does not know God and trust him one cannot be wise, that is, possess the virtue of prudence.”¹⁰⁴ In addition to this virtue of faith was his life of piety; thus Abraham’s faith and holiness give us that understanding that “the law of God is compatible with the law of nature.”¹⁰⁵ And these two were well blended in Abraham’s life. He discovered the true wisdom of God, and he never departed from that truth. He lived his life with the fear of God and obedience to God’s command. In truth

¹⁰³ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 48.

¹⁰⁴ Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 280.

¹⁰⁵ Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 49 (quoting Philo, *On Abraham* 13.60-14.67).

and with fear of the Lord Abraham maintained good relationship with his nephew Lot, his servants and all the people he lived with and was prudent in dealing with them.

Prudence “lies in the knowledge of the truth.”¹⁰⁶ Since Abraham discovered this knowledge and practiced it all his life, and since Abraham, our father in faith, maintained his relationship with God and taught his son Isaac to live a good and virtuous life by discerning and discovering the truth, and this knowledge of the truth was passed on to other patriarchs, Ambrose, therefore, submits that “our people were the first to specify that prudence consists in the knowledge of the truth. Which of the philosophers lived before Abraham or David or Solomon?”¹⁰⁷ These figures; Abraham, David, and Solomon in the Old Testament existed before the ancient philosophers. Ambrose looks at the life of David, “in whom prudence was combined with fortitude.”¹⁰⁸ He then underscores the wisdom of Solomon, “to whom the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”¹⁰⁹ There was great wisdom or prudence in Abraham’s decision; “he refused to put attraction of keeping his son before the command of his creator.”¹¹⁰ The climax of Abraham’s demonstration of prudence is in his careful and calculated arrangement of the sacrifice of Isaac in obedience to God’s command:

He rises at dawn and is ready to do the hard work necessary in preparation for the sacrifice, not delegating it to the servants who accompany him and Isaac. When the party approaches the sacrifice site, Abraham dissimulates with his servant: ‘He spoke deceitfully to his servants.’ This is a deception that Ambrose finds acceptable...he does so justifiably, so that his servants will not know what is about to happen and will not try to prevent him from following God’s orders.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 138.

¹⁰⁷ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, 187.

¹⁰⁸ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 138.

¹⁰⁹ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 138.

¹¹⁰ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 138.

¹¹¹ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 64.

In the above passage, Abraham did not only demonstrate the virtue of wisdom but also fortitude in taking the bold step to sacrifice his only son, justice in trying to be fair and just before the God who gave him Isaac his only son, and of course temperance as he tries to keep his servants out of his business and his decision to offer his son. The patriarchs in the Bible know God and had fear of the Lord, and they all “possess the classical cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice as well as varieties of other virtues.”¹¹² Another good exemplar in the Bible presented by Ambrose in his virtue theory is that of Joseph. In Ambrose’s work, “Joseph is depicted as a Christian-Stoic sage and as the single the most perfect example of virtue among the four patriarchs. Not only does Joseph possess, from his youth, the cardinal virtues that the patriarchs all manifest, but he also possesses the virtues of the statesman.”¹¹³ It is customary for Ambrose to identify a primary virtue in a patriarch; in the case of Joseph, Ambrose identified a specific Christian virtue of chastity. Even though chastity has been ascribed to Joseph, it is neither his only virtue or his most important form of moral excellence. His chastity emanates from his virtue of temperance and self-discipline which was inspired by the fear of God in him. The significant issue for us here is that “Joseph also serve as an exponent of the virtue of wisdom, a wisdom both supernatural and rational. His wisdom enables him to foresee the future and to know what is true and good as well as how to translate his theoretical knowledge into prudent and practical action.”¹¹⁴ This kind of wisdom or prudence can only come through intimacy with God, and of course Joseph from his childhood enjoyed intimacy with God. In the Bible we were told of Joseph’s dream, a dream that revealed to innocent Joseph that his brothers will bow before him and he will rule over them. This led to Joseph being envied by his brothers. Ambrose opines that “God favors him (Joseph) by

¹¹² Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 31.

¹¹³ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 127.

¹¹⁴ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 131.

granting him the grace of prophesy, sharing with him his own future plans for the covenanted people of Israel.”¹¹⁵ Even though the dream landed him into trouble with his brothers and he was later sold into slavery, he continue to manifest his gift of prophesy in a foreign land. Joseph’s wisdom was also demonstrated in his ability to interpret dreams both for fellow prisoners in the prison and for Pharaoh (cf. Genesis 40:1-23, Genesis 41:14-36). Ambrose acknowledges that Joseph endured all the suffering in prison and, despite the injustices he faced, he was patient and faithful. In fact, “Ambrose’s Joseph also manifests the virtue of fortitude. He does not render evil for evil, but returns evil with good...Following Philo’s Joseph, he bears such treatment and the suffering it causes courageously, maintaining his calm, his equanimity, and his constancy, whatever his circumstances.”¹¹⁶ In Joseph, Ambrose found a perfect exemplar for the clergy and Christians of his diocese. He retold the story of Joseph and drew out typology with the life of Christ, the suffering servant who was persecuted and punished but did not revenge but rather forgave and showed compassion toward those that crucified him.

What does this mean for Christians of Ambrose’s time? Ambrose uses the story of Joseph to teach Christians of his time moral discipline even in face of suffering unjustly. Joseph endured long suffering that came from false accusation and at the end God intervened and fought for him. He was taken out of prison and given a position in a foreign land. Ambrose does not in any way advocate docility to oppression and injustices, rather, he tries to bring out the virtues of Joseph, presenting those outstanding virtues such as chastity, temperance, wisdom, and courage to Christians who for sure maybe going through such moments of difficulties to imitate the life of Joseph. Ambrose also, uses Joseph as a perfect example as against the pagan exemplars who did

¹¹⁵ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 131

¹¹⁶ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 136. Cf. Philo, *On Joseph* 41.246-250.

not live virtuous life for eternal reward nor for the fear of the Lord but rather for either to gain worldly admiration, honor and respect. Ambrose is in fact saying, if the Roman moralists think they have exemplars who portrayed great virtues of wisdom and courage, what about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph? He picks these patriarchs and analyses their virtues one after the other. The virtues of prudence and courage are two great virtues that are very important to Christians of today who live in a turbulent and evolving world, and for the sake of this work, Abraham and Joseph depict these virtues to a higher degrees and they remain perfect exemplars for us. Besides the cardinal virtues, other virtues such as theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), and even the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Gal. 5:16) are noticeable in the lives of the patriarchs. Moreover, St. Paul also mentioned many of these virtues in some of his epistles as he addresses his audience to emulate the patriarchs and the saints. Faith and obedience for instance are virtues that the patriarchs did not have to acquire. They were given these gifts through divine grace and they on their part cooperated with that grace and God blessed them and their descendants. These theological virtues and Christian virtues will also be highlighted in our discussion of the cardinal virtues as they also form parts of the virtues that enhance the manifestation of the cardinal virtues in the biblical exemplars Ambrose used.

Jacob the son of Isaac was also an exemplar of prudence/wisdom. Ambrose asks, "Could any wisdom be greater than the wisdom holy Jacob showed? He saw God 'face to face' and earned a blessing from him."¹¹⁷ Ambrose in *De Isaac* eulogizes the wisdom of Jacob using figure of speech to describe him as he calls him a sage whose "soul sings sweet hymn of praise to God, even if his body, like a broken harp or cithara, is crushed by affliction...the sage pilots his way through

¹¹⁷ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 187.

the tempest of the world into a safe harbor, avoiding shipwreck, anchored against the storms of life, his oars proof against the rising waves of suffering; he is an ark in the midst of the deluge.”¹¹⁸ Also, “how wise Noah was- he built that great ark!”¹¹⁹ More so, “Do you not think that Moses, learned as he was in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, explored all these things? Of course, he did; yet he concluded that all such wisdom was loss and folly, he turned from it and sort God with all his heart...he was taught by God, and he confounded all the wisdom of the Egyptians, all their magic arts and powers, by the amazing feats he was able to accomplish.”¹²⁰ Ambrose’s exemplars cover many central aspects of human virtue.

Ambrose also includes certain women as exemplars, including Sarah, Rachel, and Rebecca. Ambrose presents Sarah as a good wife who “make her own important culinary contribution to the entertainment of their guests.”¹²¹ He opines that Rebecca “possess the virtue of filial piety.”¹²² More so, Ambrose ascribed to Rebecca “a large assortment of excellent moral qualities,”¹²³ such as chastity, humility, sincerity, perseverance, and patience. These women in addition to the Christian virtues they displayed in their homes have wisdom, and courage which they may learned over time living with their spouses.

The virtue of prudence or wisdom is beyond mere cleverness or being shrewd. Prudence for Ambrose is “reason based on nature, enlightened by faith as explained by holy scriptures and exemplified by holy men,”¹²⁴ and women. We can only act prudently “through mature deliberation, wise choice, and right execution”¹²⁵, and to make a wise choice, “we, first of all, must calm, not

¹¹⁸ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 98 (quoting *Ambrose’s De Isaac* 1.3.39, 1,12.56, 1.6.24, 1.8.36, 2.6.28, 2.10.44).

¹¹⁹ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 98.

¹²⁰ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 189.

¹²¹ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 59.

¹²² Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 61.

¹²³ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 82, (quoting *De Isaac*, 8.74).

¹²⁴ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 139.

¹²⁵ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 139.

influenced by passion.”¹²⁶ Above all, things should be done in the light of eternal rewards. Ambrose's usage of biblical terms and language brings out the role of faith and grace in the virtue of prudence. We see also in the revelation of Christ, the gift of grace and faith, wisdom and understanding, a perfect prudence that comes from God.

Ambrose also draws on St Paul and his explanation of the fruits of the Spirit. These fruits are manifestations of the grace that God has given to us through Christ, the ‘Eternal Wisdom.’ Paul in his letter to the Galatians outlined different virtues and corresponding vices that the people must avoid. He began by telling them the role the Holy Spirit plays in the life of Christians. Thus, “Paul’s primary argument was that the Gentile Christians at Galatia had already received the Holy Spirit apart from observing the Jewish law (Gal 3:2).”¹²⁷ Paul explains further; “through his long meditation on Abraham as the model of faith in Galatians 3 and his allegory on Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4, Paul argued from the Jewish scriptures that what counts most before God is faith and ‘not the works of the law.’”¹²⁸ Paul’s ethical teaching dwells mostly on the theological virtues and fruits of the Spirit. So, he calls on the Christian community to be vigilant. In Colossians 4:2, “he writes that we should continue steadfast in prayer,” and 1 Corinthians 16:13, he urges “Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.”¹²⁹

Thus, Ambrose’s *De Officiis* could be likened to the words of St Paul above as he encourages the Christians of his time to imitate the virtues of the patriarchs, being watchful could literally mean to be wise or prudent, and of course the virtue of fortitude was necessary if they aspire to be good Christians. Second of all, in this chapter, St Paul’s ethical teaching and allegory of Hagar and Sarah

¹²⁶ Colish, *Ambrose’s Patriarchs*, 139.

¹²⁷ Daniel J. Harrington and James Keenan, *Paul and the Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc. 2010), 109.

¹²⁸ Harrington, *Paul and the Virtue Ethics*, 109.

¹²⁹ Harrington, *Paul and the Virtue Ethics*, 127.

is mentioned here to remind us of a paradigm shift in the early life of the Christians where faith in God and virtuous living was encouraged rather than the law and earthly wisdom. This kind of eschatological view of virtue ethics was taught and encouraged among the believers in the church. Perhaps, Ambrose is only drawing from a common tradition of the apostles and Christian writers to demonstrate that prudence, fortitude and the eschatological dimension of practicing these virtues have been parts of the Christian tradition. By and large, Ambrose's definition of prudence or *Sapientia*, as knowledge of the truth that emanates from the fear of the Lord, gives us a deeper understanding of what prudence means for Christians and the biblical exemplars that Ambrose used in demonstrating the practical application of this wisdom or *Sapientia* bring us also to the reality of how important the of the virtue of prudence or *Sapientia* is to other virtues including fortitude. A courageous person needs prudence or *Sapientia* to avoid unnecessary risk. Therefore, it is good to look at what fortitude or courage means for Ambrose and the exemplars he used in presenting fortitude to his audience.

3.1.2 Prudence: Christian and Biblical Exemplars.

In traditional Christian doctrine, and even from the contemporary Christian perspective, “prudence is the mold and ‘mother’ of all the cardinal virtues, of justice, fortitude, and temperance.”¹³⁰ This view places the pre-eminence of prudence above the other virtues. Thus, the structural framework of the Christian is very important, it holds that God is Truth and true wisdom comes from God. Thus, prudence is judged as wisdom and knowledge matched with acts of bravery. Daniel Harrington, in his analysis of the sermon of Jesus on the mount in Matthew's composition, brings out the role of wisdom in Christian ethics, he says that "the first of the five

¹³⁰ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance* (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1954), 3.

great discourses in Matthew's narrative of Jesus (on the beatitudes), deals with true happiness, the proper interpretation of the Law and the Prophets, genuine piety, wise attitude and behavior in everyday life, and the need to translate wisdom into action."¹³¹ Even though the beatitudes dwell more on the theological virtues of charity, it is also important to state that charity plays key role in both virtues of prudence and courage. It is usually said "prudence is the mold of moral virtues; but charity molds even prudence itself."¹³² In addition, the Christian teaching of prudence stands against the common mind, who will always think of prudence as being contradictory to fortitude since it is believed that "a prudent man is thought to be one who avoids the embarrassing situation of having to be brave."¹³³ And probably seen as always cleverly escaping being committed. Also, the contemporary mind tends to misunderstand prudence by regarding "lies and cowardice prudent, truthfulness and courageous sacrifices imprudent."¹³⁴ Classical Christian Ethics "maintains that Man can be prudent and good only simultaneously; that prudence is part and parcel of the definition of goodness; that there is no sort of justice and fortitude which runs counter to the virtue of prudence."¹³⁵ Thus, classical theology continues to hold that prudence is the cause of other virtues, it is the measure of three other virtues, and that prudence reforms the other virtues and brings out their essence. The Ten Commandment for instance is "the realization in practice of prudence."¹³⁶ Thus one can clearly say then that "prudence is the cause, root, mother, measure, precept, guide, and prototype of all ethical virtues."¹³⁷ Having given some descriptions and characteristics of prudence, biblical exemplars will give us a better and enriching understanding of Christians perspective of prudence. Ambrose in his treatise on De Abraham argues that "Abraham's life from

¹³¹ Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, 61.

¹³² Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 37

¹³³ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 4

¹³⁴ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 5.

¹³⁵ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 5.

¹³⁶ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 8.

¹³⁷ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 8.

his call to leave his native Chaldea up through his death, satisfied his son Isaac is suitably married to Rebecca and that the young couple are prepared to take up their assigned duties as bearers of the covenant into the next generation,”¹³⁸ is a model worthy of imitation. The virtue Ambrose singled out in Abraham is faith (a theological virtue). However, he added that “in addition to manifesting ‘simple faith in Truth,’ Abraham also displays ‘prudence, justice, charity, and chastity.’”¹³⁹ There is also an exemplar of the virtues of prudence in Genesis, where Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He also commanded them saying, “thus you shall say to my Lord Esau: ‘thus says your servant Jacob, “I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my Lord, that I may find favor in your sight...”’ (Genesis 32: 3-21). Jacob was not a coward in any way but he chose to deal intelligently with his brother with whom war was imminent. The story portrays the wisdom and prudence of Jacob in dealing with his older brother Esau and peace was restored within them instead of war. David is another example of prudence in the second book of Samuel which is the instance of David, overthrowing Ahithophel's shrewd advice. In the passage, David said to Achish, “if you go with me, then you will be burden to me. But if you return to the city, and said to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king, as I have been your father’s servant in time past’, so I will now be your servant, then you can thwart the counsel of Ahithophel for me.” (2 Samuel 15:32-37). David was able to get information from Absalom’s court and planned ahead of him. In the Acts of the Apostles, The Apostles continue to preach and teach in the name of Jesus and some of the Pharisees made a plan to kill them. In addition to these exemplars are other passages in the bible where references are made to prudence as a virtue. In Proverbs references are made to wisdom and prudence: The wisdom of

¹³⁸ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 47 (quoting Ambrose, De Abr, 1.1.2)

¹³⁹ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 48.

the sensible is to understand his way (Proverbs 14:8), The prudent man sees evil and hides (Proverbs 22:3), and every prudent man acts with knowledge (Proverbs 13:16).

3.2. Fortitude and Exemplars

Since all the virtues are connected and united in Ambrose's patriarchal exemplars, it is necessary to at this point understand what the virtue of fortitude means for Ambrose and how it connects with the virtue of prudence in his exemplars. Fortitude or courage is the third of the cardinal virtue, "which, whether we are dealing with the business of war or the affairs of domestic life, always has the same effect; it manifests itself in loftiness and greatness of spirit, and evident too in physical strength."¹⁴⁰ Ambrose's definition of courage is not completely different from those of the philosophers but in his exemplars, one might notice differences since Ambrose makes distinctions between physical strength and moral courage in such a way that he talks about the source of fortitude and the ultimate goal or end of fortitude. Ambrose begins his analysis of the virtue of fortitude by placing the virtue of fortitude on a higher scale among other virtues. Secondly, he divided courage into two types; the courage that deals with the business of war and that which deals with ordinary domestic affairs. Ambrose agrees that the affairs of war appear to be alien or foreign to the kind of duty which concerns Christians, specifically the clergy and the religious. Though he acknowledges that "our ancestors, men like Joshua son of Nun, or Jerubbaal, or Samson, or David, won great glory in the affairs of war as well,"¹⁴¹ but their virtue was born out of necessity and just war not for personal glory. Ivor Davidson shows how Ambrose referred to the necessity of just war; David for example "never engaged in war unless he was provoked. This way, he was able to combine courage with prudence when it came to battle."¹⁴² Besides, "he

¹⁴⁰ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 185.

¹⁴¹ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 219.

¹⁴² Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 221.

never undertook a war without consulting the Lord first."¹⁴³ In this way, he puts himself right before God and goes into battle with God on his side.

Fortitude, as it is stated earlier, is "a virtue that is concerned with both warfare and at home is conspicuous in the greatness of mind and distinguishes itself in the strength of the body."¹⁴⁴ The above understanding of fortitude is also how Cicero defines it, so at this point, there wouldn't be much difference between Ambrose's fortitude and that of Cicero. To make his position clearer and more acceptable to his audience, Ambrose divided fortitude into military and civic, physical or moral fortitude or fortitude of mind or soul and fortitude of the body as he makes this distinction about fortitude, Ambrose warns that cowardice should never be an option for fear of danger. For anyone to be able to stand firm and be courageous to face both physical and moral danger the mind must be trained to be strong.

Ambrose moved a bit from Cicero's understanding of fortitude by making some distinctions between physical and moral fortitude and also talking about the source of fortitude. He opines that "spiritual and physical training of the mind would not be sufficient if there was no deeper source, a source that inspires fortitude, 'which Christ's warrior has.'"¹⁴⁵ That source for Ambrose is eternity, it is a reward from God. It is at this point that Ambrose introduces the scripture into his understanding of fortitude and courage. Citing the courageous men of the Old Testament and using Daniel as an exemplar Ambrose says,

We learn too of the glorious courage of those who, through faith, and with greatness of spirit, 'stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the force of fire, escaped the edge of the

¹⁴³ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 221.

¹⁴⁴ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 156.

¹⁴⁵ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 156.

sword, and out of weakness grew courageous,' they were not surrounded by comrades- in arms or by legions... They fought and won their triumphs single-handedly over infidels.¹⁴⁶

Ambrose without mincing words submits that “the glory of courage does not consist merely in physical strength or the power of muscle: it is to be found far more in valor of spirit,”¹⁴⁷ which is not harming people but protecting them from being harmed. Ambrose says that we should be courageous not only in defending ourselves but others too. He uses Moses as an exemplar to be emulated, for he defended the poor Israelite: “for when he saw a Hebrew being ill-treated by an Egyptian, he defended him.”¹⁴⁸ For “Solomon also says: rescue a man who is being taken to meet his death.”¹⁴⁹ This kind of defense is not restricted to physical defense but could also be moral defense through the greatness of spirit and wise negotiation or decision.

Ambrose studied and understood what fortitude is and also saw the greatness of spirit in biblical exemplars. The courage of Job in enduring all the attacks of the devil, and overcoming him by the sheer valor of his heart, is real courage for Ambrose. Job's life is an example of real courage:

The kind which is truly worthy of the name is to be seen when an individual masters himself and contains his anger; when he is not weakened or turned aside by any of the alluring things that the world has to offer; when he does not become too dismayed when times are hard or too excited when they are going well, and when he is not carried around, as it were, by every wind of changing circumstance.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 221.

¹⁴⁷ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 221.

¹⁴⁸ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 221.

¹⁴⁹ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 221.

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 221

Ambrose attributed three remote ends to the virtue of fortitude; personal, social, and religious. The personal end or goal “is the perfection of the individual Christian here on earth and his eternal happiness in heaven.”¹⁵¹ The social object of fortitude is to fight for the liberation of others, Ambrose calls fortitude “a virtue of peace and justice, a virtue that can recount the words of Job in the Bible; ‘I saved the poor out of the hand of the powerful and I gave help to the orphan who had no one to help him.’”¹⁵² Ambrose admonishes the clergy and religious of his diocese to courageously fight for the poor, especially those who had no one to help them. Social justice is a work of a courageous person, not for the weak of heart or spirit. Above all, Ambrose also warned and reminded the Christians; “thou are fighting for God. He is the highest Good.”¹⁵³ Therefore, in fighting for the poor, the attention must not be on us; the glory is not ours but to God.

Fortitude cannot be conquered, for when “the mind is trained and taught to stand firm so as never to be disturbed by any fear or broken by any troubles or yield to any torments,”¹⁵⁴ then, it can be sustained. A good example for me will be the moral courage of Job in in standing firm despite the pressure on him to give up his faith in God. Job’s response depicts that of a man whose mind has been trained to endure torments and not disturbed or broken, “naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will return, the Lord had given and the Lord has taken, blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job. 1:21). This statement of Job confirms the high level of the greatness of spirit Job had.

This is also the kind of fortitude St Paul demonstrated in the Book of Acts of the Apostles; Paul was taken into custody by the Romans (Acts 23:10), with a false accusation that could lead

¹⁵¹ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 159.

¹⁵² Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 223.

¹⁵³ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 160.

¹⁵⁴ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 161.

to his execution. Yet, Paul maintains an act of extraordinary courage, he continues his work of preaching the crucified Jesus despite the threats (Acts 23:1-10). With courage and faith in God, Paul saved the lives of hundreds of people amid the shipwreck (Acts 27: 22-23). He admonished some Christians who were weeping for him using these words, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). Paul did not only demonstrate the greatness of spirit, he also encouraged Christians to do the same; in his second letter to the people of Corinth he says:

We are hard pressed on every side, not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:8,9,16-18).

The above statement of St Paul in scripture summarizes the fortitude Ambrose advocated and taught the early Christians. It is not cowardice, neither is it a tolerance of evil but a show of resilience and courage to stand firm bearing testimony to the truth. Ambrose traces the virtue of courage in Abraham to his fight to save his nephew Lot from the hands of the kings of his region who went to war with Lot. It also shows that Abraham was ready to risk his life to save his nephew, it also shows the physical courage and military prowess of Abraham. Colish puts it clearer that "the fact that Abraham goes to war on Lot's behalf reflects his courage and his willingness to undertake risk. It suggests that Abraham also possesses considerable military prowess since the 318 men he takes with him into battle are vastly outnumbered."¹⁵⁵ Abraham was not afraid of his

¹⁵⁵ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 161.

opponents and their allies. This example of Abraham also shows what Ambrose's model of courage or fortitude is, that first of all, Ambrose is not totally against military courage or just war if there is a need for it. Second of all, if it is to liberate the poor or people who are oppressed then it is a risk worth taking. Abraham was victorious in the war, and he attributed his victory to God and not to his military acumen. More so, he displayed his magnanimity when he generously gave Melchizedek the priest an offering of a tenth percent of the booty from the war. This act of charity, justice, and retribution also demonstrates Abraham's faithfulness, prudence, and generosity; virtues that Ambrose encourages Christians to imitate.

3.2.1 Fortitude: Christian Sources and Biblical Exemplars.

The Christian definition of the virtue of fortitude was fine-tuned by Thomas Aquinas as "the moral virtue by which one resists difficulties that repel the will from acting according to reason. It is a special virtue insofar as it signifies firmness of spirit to endure and resist the greatest difficulties."¹⁵⁶ The virtue of fortitude which for some it is the greatness of spirit and others courage does not mean fearlessness. Therefore, "whoever exposes himself to a danger- even for the sake of good- without knowledge of its perils, either from instinctive optimism (nothing can happen to me) or from firm confidence in his own natural strength and fighting fitness, does not on that account possess the virtue of fortitude."¹⁵⁷ It is therefore necessary to distinguish between boldness, physical courage, strength, and Christian fortitude. While one does not deny that every act of bravery, courage, or fortitude demands some level of risk and sacrifice, it is good to also advocate for that which seeks the ultimate good and does not work in favor of vain glory. Thus,

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *The Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance*, Richard J. Regan, trans. (Indiana: Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), 106.

¹⁵⁷ Pieper, "The Four Cardinal Virtues," 126.

Christian fortitude integrates the spiritual and intellectual sense and matches that with some degree of perfection that emanates from interior life.

The spiritual gifts of fortitude demonstrated in the beatitudes do not encourage passivity in the face of evil, and neither does the Church advocate for passivity in the face of oppression. In all things, the church encourages us not to despair or give up in our struggle against evil and oppression and not to retaliate with evil but rather work toward the ultimate good, with courageous acts that are built on the grace of God and for the good of all. The Church acknowledges that fortitude is "a virtue which is in a very special sense, primarily and by name, a 'heroic' virtue, that is, the fortitude exalted by grace, the fortitude of the mystic life."¹⁵⁸ It is the kind of heroism in the example of Moses in the book of Exodus. Moses responded to God's call to go back to Egypt to save his people, the Jews from the suffering they were encountering. Moses agreed to go on this bold journey because God promised to walk with him (Exodus 3: 11-12). Remember, Pharaoh was a big force to reckon with, besides Moses ran out of Egypt because he murdered an Egyptian. Going back to face Pharaoh and to also liberate the people of Israel needed great amount of faith and courage. The book of First Samuel records the epic power tussle between the people of Israel and their chief enemy, the Philistines. The Israelites were scared of Goliath the giant fighter. The young David, though not a soldier, trusted in God, took courage to fight Goliath, and defeated him. He said; "the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistines" (1 Samuel 17: 32-33). David's came from the protection he has gotten in the past from God in times of danger, his confidence was not in himself but in God and for the ultimate good. Esther courageously took a big risk to persuade her husband, King Xerxes, to thwart the plans of Haman against the Jews. She was inspired by her faith in God

¹⁵⁸ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 126

and the desire to save God's people. These were her words; "go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). Esther liberated the Jews, through the grace and power of God. The various exemplars illustrated, show the Christian understanding of fortitude or courage. Their exemplars demonstrated true heroism that is devoid of self-glorification, and they were for the greater good which is the ultimate good.

The Unity of the Virtues

Ambrose like Aristotle and some ancient philosophers believes in the unity of virtues and the links and connections between the virtues. In all his exemplars, specifically, the patriarchs, Ambrose identifies more than one virtue in them. In *De Joseph* according to Colish Ambrose identifies more than one virtue in Joseph and each of the virtue was linked or united with the other virtues; "if temperance enables Joseph to confine his sexual activity to marriage, it also informs the modesty that he possess from his childhood."¹⁵⁹ Besides, "Joseph also serves as an exponent of wisdom, a wisdom both supra-rational and rational."¹⁶⁰ Also, "Joseph's service as a statesman can also be seen as the culmination of his exercise of the virtue of justice no less than of the virtue of wisdom."¹⁶¹ Finally, "as an exponent of justice, Ambrose's Joseph manifests the virtue of fortitude. He does not render evil for evil, but returns evil with good."¹⁶² One cannot be said to be virtuous if he is great in one virtue and is found wanting in the other virtues completely. However, a particular virtue may be demonstrated more in a person who may have other virtues. In the case

¹⁵⁹ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 130.

¹⁶⁰ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 131.

¹⁶¹ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 134.

¹⁶² Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 136.

of Abraham for example, Ambrose counted faith first which was not acquired but inherent in him, in addition, Abraham demonstrated a high level of prudence and wisdom in his relationship with God and fellow human beings, he was courageous, just, and temperate as well. Ambrose said beside faith, every other virtue was learned and mastered by Abraham as he journeyed through life. Ambrose submits that "Abraham learned how to rise above vice with a steadfast mind, the mark of a sage."¹⁶³ In his argument on this, Ambrose emphasizes that every human being can desire what is good. We become perfect if we learn the act of self-mastery and self-control of our desires.

Over and over, Ambrose emphasizes 'right reason' as being able to "teach us how to bear and forebear, counseling mercy and forgiveness."¹⁶⁴ This was taught by the Stoics, and it also exists in both the Old and New Testaments; from this we are taught and by the exemplars who lived and practiced virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and courage, and other virtues like humility, obedience and fear of the Lord. It is pertinent to know that Ambrose in his work *De Isaac* submits that "neither the natural law nor the law of Moses suffices. Rather, it is the grace of Christ, forgiving our past sins and giving us the strength to struggle effectively against sin once we are reborn, that enables us to attain virtue in the here and now and eternal glory in the next life."¹⁶⁵ Thus, for Ambrose, it is divine grace and the Christian virtues that empower the sage to practice Stoic virtues."¹⁶⁶ Therefore, Ambrose did not hesitate to place Christian virtue theory and ethics ahead of the pagans', using the patriarchs as the best models of virtues. Besides using the patriarchs, Ambrose also uses the martyrdom of the seven Maccabee brothers and their mother to teach Christians that the greatness of spirit and perfect virtue is possible at any age. More so, the

¹⁶³ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 67.

¹⁶⁴ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 97.

¹⁶⁵ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 97 (quoting Ambrose, *De Isaac* 1.3.12-1.6.23).

¹⁶⁶ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtues*, 99.

seven brothers manifested the virtues of “faith, courage, constancy, reason, obedience to God's law, and the love of holiness.”¹⁶⁷ The moral lesson from the Maccabee brothers is the ability to endure suffering with the hope of eternity. Ambrose encourages the Milanese Christians to be prepared to imitate Christ, with the following question; “why should we not endure hard and bitter suffering for Christ, when he accepted such indignities for us?”¹⁶⁸ Ambrose has given to the Christians of his time and even to Christians today, the gift of Christian ethics that is guided by the scripture and the lives of the patriarchs. These models and exemplars are worthy of emulation and imitation.

Moral courage is needed more than ever in our world today, and Ambrose’s exemplars are perfect models for the Christians of our time. These biblical exemplars continue to be relevant to every generation from the ancient time to the present time. The early Christian moralists did not hesitate to teach the people of their times with biblical exemplars. Ambrose followed the footsteps of great teachers like Tertullian of Carthage, Clement of Alexandria. In his virtue theory, Ambrose according to Robert Louis Wilken, “is less a philosopher interested in critical analysis than a teacher with an eye on what works.”¹⁶⁹ In fact, Ambrose’s virtue theory worked for the Christians of his time and it will be relevant to the Nigerian Christians who are also caught in the web of moral decadence and evil. The next chapter will focus on how Ambrose’s virtue theory could be taught and practiced by the Nigerian Christians. In addition to exploring the application of Ambrose’s virtue theory among the Nigerian Christians, there is need to highlight some local exemplars that should be imitated by Christians in Nigeria, as this will bring the message of Ambrose closer to the people, and create in them the desire to learn, master, and practice these

¹⁶⁷ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 123.

¹⁶⁸ Cirsis, *Ennoblement of Pagan Virtue*, 124.

¹⁶⁹ Robert, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 281.

great virtues of prudence and fortitude. Prior to the advent of Christianity, Nigeria like every African society has its moral and ethical values. These ethical values were not in opposition to the Christian values that the missionary taught. Thus, the movement towards the application of these great virtues (prudence and courage) taught by Ambrose is what Nigeria needs at this time.

Chapter 4

4.0 The Relevance of the Virtues of Fortitude and Prudence and Their Application among Nigerian Christians.

Chapter three of this work discussed extensively the virtue theory of Ambrose with specific attention on the virtues of prudence and fortitude. Having highlighted what prudence and fortitude meant for the Christians of his time, I showed how Ambrose used biblical exemplars like Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and David to demonstrate further what it means to be prudent and courageous in a way that is appealing and acceptable to Christians. Ambrose wrote his work *De Officiis* in the fourth century, and it was intended for the clergy, religious, and those in formation in the diocese of Milan where he was a bishop. However, Ivor Davidson holds that it was also intended “for more general consumption since some examples include passages on the greed of merchants (1.242-5), or fraud in business contracts (3.57-75),” issues that are not related to the duties of the clergy.¹⁷⁰ The fact is that Ambrose was addressing moral problems of his era, and in doing this, he reconstructed the virtue theory of the ancient philosophers using biblical exemplars and encouraged all Christians, not just the leaders, to imitate them.

As I have shown in earlier chapters, the ultimate goal of human existence for the ancient philosophers was the pursuit of happiness. This pursuit of happiness for the hedonists is centered on pleasure. However, Aristotle argues that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is not only an activity of the body but that of the soul per virtue. And Ambrose, following Aristotle’s ethical principles, suggests that these moral principles, which he named cardinal virtues (prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance), besides being important to our existence and happiness, are centered on God, more so that God is the source of those principles or virtues through God’s relationship with the people

¹⁷⁰ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 16.

of Israel as narrated in the scripture. Therefore, God is the source of human existence and happiness. Thus, prudence for Ambrose comes from the fear of the Lord, and fortitude is strengthened and guided by this wisdom or prudence.

The moral challenges bedeviling Nigerian society today should not be overlooked, and the seeming acceptance of this moral degeneration by the Christians who either have become accomplices or lack the courage to challenge this moral evil is also worrisome. Therefore, seeking the face and intervention of Ambrose through his work on virtue theory has become a necessity. In addition, the biblical exemplars Ambrose used are good models of virtues of prudence and fortitude for Christians in Nigeria to imitate. Ambrose's virtue theory created a standard ethical understanding for Christians and those in Nigeria will benefit from this rich ethical heritage. Ambrose's virtue theory is not only relevant to Nigerian Christians but should be recommended for all Nigerians because what is lacking in Nigeria today is "the fear of the Lord" and the moral courage to resist evil and fight for what is good. The virtues of prudence and courage should be practiced in every area and office in Nigeria. Thus, the lack of leadership characteristics such as prudence and fortitude can constitute grave problems in any society. Besides, "the elevation of ethnicity, economic injustice and the massive problems of corruption into the process of social change and modernization have constituted a big burden in the polity"¹⁷¹ of Nigeria. The social order in Nigeria has been disrupted by the leadership of that country. Thus corruption has been enthroned as normal, and a situation where bad and shameful behaviors become acceptable shows that a society has lost its ethical value.

¹⁷¹ Omolumen Dawood Egbefo, "Ethnicity, Economic, Injustice and Problems of Massive Corruption: Correlates in Explaining Why Good Governance Eludes Nigeria," *Namibia Journal of Managerial Science* 1.2 (2015): 1.

4.1 The Nigerian Case.

Every nation struggles with moral issues and social problems; however, the story of Nigeria is a sad one because “the Nigeria we have now is a business corporation of Thoughtless leaders.”¹⁷² Thoughtless persons according to Mimi Wariboko “commit evil without knowing it, without caring, without even the shame of it. Their conscience cannot tell right from wrong. Their minds’ inherent capacity for reflexivity and correction has, it seems, disappeared. They cannot look at anything from an enlarged mentality or others’ point of view. Their souls are in the final stage of disintegration.”¹⁷³ This state of disintegration and banality of evil has placed Nigeria and its citizens in moral decadence and hopelessness. Besides the failure of leadership, which remains a hard nut to crack, Nigeria is faced with multiple problems: bribery and corruption at all levels, examination malpractice in institutions of higher learning, drug abuse, social injustice, parental irresponsibility, kidnapping, and extrajudicial killing, etc. The Nigerian case is a peculiar one; James Michael Okpalaonwuka puts it right when he submits that “the leadership of the independent Nigerian state fell into the hands of a people, some of whom were not interested in nation-building. They were primarily interested in using state power to acquire wealth for themselves, their families and their collaborators.”¹⁷⁴ Nigeria has gone through the hands of many corrupt leaders who looted the public treasury and brought economic hardship to the masses; the military junta Ibrahim Babangida “who introduced the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986, single-handedly siphoned the Gulf War 1991 proceeds.”¹⁷⁵ Another military president, Sani Abacha, “who

¹⁷² Mimi Wariboko, *Ethics and Society in Nigeria: Identity, History, Political Theory* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 20.

¹⁷³ Wariboko, *Ethics and Society in Nigeria*, 20.

¹⁷⁴ James Michael Okpalaonwuka, *Morality and Politics in Nigeria: Moral Integration in Nigeria Politics as a Way Out* (Frankfurt; New York: P. Lang, 1997), 29.

¹⁷⁵ Comfort Onanife and Chris Ojukwu, “Democratic Governance and Fuel Crisis in Nigeria,” in Akanji Tajudeen et al (eds.) *Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria (Society for Peace Studies and Practice: John Archers Publ., 2011)*, 66.

according to Nuhu Ribadu, former chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), was believed to have taken for himself about \$5-6 billion, from Nigeria coffers.”¹⁷⁶ Besides, even the democratically elected officers in Nigeria have also shown that corruption has become a cancerous disease in Nigerian government. One of those instances of corrupt practices, is that of “the PPRTT (Presidential Pension Reform Task Term), led by Abdulrasheed Maina, used the names of high government officials to mismanage about N140 million under the guise of travel expenditures to carry biometric data of police pensioners outside the nation.”¹⁷⁷ A second instance is that of that of former minister of petroleum in Nigeria Diezani Alison Madueke, she was the president of OPEC (organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), “Madueke has been accused with fraud and misappropriation of public funds in Nigeria since 2015. EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) discovered substantial amount of gold, large amount of money and other valuable items during a search of her properties she acquired through fraudulent means.”¹⁷⁸ In fact, the list of the financial culprits in Nigeria is countless, and the worst is that most of them get away with little or no punishment or accountability. Nigeria, for sure, is not the only country bedeviled with moral decadence, however, the case of Nigeria is painful because of its level of degeneration and the nonchalant attitudes of Christians, religious organizations, and even the church leaders. The failure of the church leaders to take the leading position in the crusade against moral decadence is a menace. In a way, most religious leaders have become accomplices. The truth is that “when evil is not confronted, it becomes a way of being and those in it no longer

¹⁷⁶ Aluko Adeniran, “Political Corruption and National Security in Nigeria: The Imperatives of Transformational Leadership,” in Isaac O. Albert, Willie Aziegbe Eselebor, and Nathaniel Danjibo, eds., *Peace, Security and Development in Nigeria* (Abuja: Dugbe, Ibadan: Society for Peace Studies and Practice in association with Peace and Conflict Studies Programme, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan: in Collaboration with John Archers Publishers, 2012), 474.

¹⁷⁷ Sophia Abiri-Franklin and Olubukola Olugasa, “Transplanting Cooperate Sustainability into the Code of Conduct for Public Officers: A Nigerian Perspective,” *Current Trends in Humanities and Law Research (CTHLR)*, 1.2 (2022), 33.

¹⁷⁸ Abiri-Franklin and Olugasa, “Transplanting Cooperate Sustainability,” 33.

realize that things could be different.”¹⁷⁹ The big questions today for most Nigerians and for Christians in particular are: Should we remain docile in the face of evil? And if we choose to confront moral decadence, how prepared are we? Do we have the wisdom and the moral courage to fight corruption? It is questions such as these that have led to the choice of Ambrose’s virtue theory, specifically the virtue of prudence and fortitude as a way forward and a step in the right direction towards becoming a better and just society. More so, there is a serious need to regenerate the encounter between the Nigerian traditional society and missionaries, the missionaries built schools and their teachers did not only teach religion but also taught moral instructions. This encounter seems to have given way to a new dimension of teaching that is centered on prosperity, affluence, social-political importance, and economic growth.

Today, instead of engaging in catechesis and moral instructions, “pastors have become religious entrepreneurs bent on building large corporate-style organizations that are profitable to boot. The end of the retreat from the world and sectarian inclination that came with religious entrepreneurship and the fight for a market share of burgeoning Pentecostal membership nudged some of the key leaders into the national political scene.”¹⁸⁰ Besides, the constant zeal displayed by some Catholic priests and pastors of other churches of this generation in Nigeria to liberate people from spiritual bondage through crusade is higher than the zeal to teach the core values of the gospel of Christ that was centered on both spiritual and social-political liberation from unjust structures and injustices. This paradigm shifts of church leaders from teaching the ethical values of Christianity to the preaching of prosperity led to serious moral crises and the misplacement of values among Christians and other Nigerians. People cannot be moral transformers if preachers

¹⁷⁹ Wariboko, *Ethics and Society in Nigeria*, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Mimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2014), 27; quoting Ruth Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating the Global and Pentecostalism” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (1998) 306.

continue to preach a “prosperity gospel” that is built on the acquisition of power and wealth rather than moral, spiritual, and social transformation.

Virtue must be the backbone of any personality, religion, society, or nation. Sometimes, however, the ultimate sacrifice in humanity and Christendom as a movement, in particular, it is necessary to stand up for what is deemed right in this world and save our souls in the next. Prudence is the virtue that we need in our search for truth and wisdom that will guide our actions while Fortitude is the virtue of the martyrs, who are willing to give up their lives rather than renounce their faith. Thus, ancient Greek writers such as Aristotle, following Plato, believe that we all begin with a single fundamental desire a desire for our good, i.e., a desire for our own deep happiness or flourishing as human beings. This desire motivates at the bottom all of our voluntary actions. Unfortunately, we begin with a narrow and perverted self-love a self-centered desire for the ‘private’ or ‘autonomous’ on one understanding of well-being. Thus, Atalia Omer thinks that:

According to Aristotle and Plato on the ground of virtue of fortitude and prudence, this perverted self-love needs to be, and can be, transformed into rightly-ordered self-love, which includes the desire to will the good for others and to commit oneself to higher and more noble goods that transcend one's private good, narrowly conceived.¹⁸¹

In the end, our goal is or should be to become individuals who are fit for genuine friendship at a political as well as a personal level, and self-transcending commitments that entail making sacrifices for transcendent common goods. In “going out” of ourselves, as it were, in this way, we at least approach our true fulfillment as individuals. The pursuit of happiness in this case, for the Nigerian Christians should not be devoid of moral principles that are based on Christian values. Ambrose’s theory of prudence and fortitude have so much to contribute to this genuine

¹⁸¹ Atalia Omer and Jason Spring, *Christian Religious Nationalism: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 13.

transformation of the individual Nigerian and the society at large. Thus, from the perspective of prudence, it is of great interest to argue that the human transformation from perverted self-love to rightly ordered self-love essentially involves an extensive program of formation of belief, carried out by those who take part in our upbringing and aimed in part at habituating our affections in the right way. The conviction here is that we can appropriately moderate our affections, including our concupiscible and irascible passions along with our will, to use the idea of fortitude and prudence to liberate ourselves from the slavery of perverted self-love. On this ground, prudence becomes the central virtue in this scheme of Christianity not only in Nigeria but all over the world, because it is precisely the proper use of practical reason that sets the parameters for the escape from disordered passion and malice of will.

4.2 The Virtue of Prudence and Its Application Among Nigerian Christians.

The virtue of prudence, besides being an important virtue, should be desired, acquired, mastered and applied by all in our day-to-day life. Thus, prudence is not only the discovery and knowledge of the truth but a practical application of the knowledge with caution and discretion. While prudence from a more Nigerian Christian view sometimes dictates caution, and hasty action is seldom prudent, there are times when it is prudent to act quickly; Ambrose praised the wisdom of Jacob for acting quickly as soon as he heard Esau and his army were coming against him by sending his servants and all his belonging ahead of him to meet with Esau his brother (Genesis 32: 3-27). The examples of Jacob's encounter with Esau and Laban his father-in-law show how prudent Jacob was; "as his encounter with Esau approaches, Jacob is told that his brother is coming to meet him, and he is both afraid and distressed (Gen 32:7, 11), although he masters this emotions"¹⁸² which was a display of prudence and courage. Jacob equally tackled his father-in-law Laban who

¹⁸² Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 120.

was dishonest with him, “he becomes angry... and he leaves without informing his father-in-law of his time of departure because he is afraid that Laban will try to stop him and take back his daughters and the flocks that he claims Jacob has stolen from him (Gen 31;31, 37).”¹⁸³ In the above instances, Jacob acted quick and wisely. Thus, by acting quick and wisely, he averted what could have led to serious war between him and his brother. Having a lengthy conversation about a particular problem and its consequence before acting would not be tagged prudent, but cowardly. This is sometimes the case in less obviously urgent matters as well religious problems. For example, it would not be prudent to hesitate in stemming the influence of an erroneous religious leader that might confuse or scandalize the faithful. Sometimes a carefully planned and gradual response is best, but at other times a quick denunciation of the error is in order. Prudence can be regarded as the virtue that sees the best way and commands the will to execute that approach. Prudence or wisdom should be the first in the list of human virtues that everyone who seeks to live a balanced life must cultivate. Prudence is in fact that which disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every situation and to choose the right means of achieving it.

We have acknowledged that Nigeria is in a moral crisis at this time, just like many other nations in the world, and ascertained that part of the problem is the disinterest in religious and moral doctrine among religious leaders and Christians. With a high level of negligence and docility among religious leaders, parents, teachers, and all those involved in moral formation and instruction, it has become obvious that things are falling apart and the center is losing its hold. What then are the necessary steps to be taken if we must rebuild the moral structure in Nigerian and instill moral responsibility in Christians? Prudence is not only a prime virtue but a necessary virtue in rebuilding our moral structure.

¹⁸³ Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 120.

The first step towards imparting the moral principle of prudence among Christians is to begin moral instruction classes in elementary schools and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In 2020, I visited an elementary (primary) school in Nigeria, I bought some cookies, chocolate, and soda for the children in the 5th and 6th grades to be shared among the kids. They were 50 pupils in each of the classes but we made sure we gave things worth 45 and selected 5 pupils from each as leaders to share. We watched them as the leaders shared those items with excitement. The leaders in the 6th grade took their cookies and soda first before sharing with others, and when they discovered it wasn't enough, they try to persuade the remaining people to wait until they are able to lay complaints to us for extra soda and cookies before they will get their share of the items, but those who didn't get their refused and they started fighting. Those in the 5th grade made sure others got their first, and upon discovering that they couldn't get theirs walked up to us and told us the items were shared and 45 people among them got theirs except those of them who were involved in the sharing. I asked them how did they feel, they said they feel disappointed but happy that others got so there was no crisis in the room, and they hope they will get theirs anytime. When we got to the classroom of the 6th grade, there was commotion everywhere because those who didn't get theirs refused to sit quietly, seeing that the leaders got theirs they decided to put up a fight to collect their share. At this point, we commended the wisdom of the leaders in the 5th grade and I reached out to my bag and gave them two sodas each for a job well done while we scolded those in the 6th grade that it would have been better if they made sure everyone got his or hers before taking their shares since they were the leaders. We acknowledged their lack of wisdom or prudence while we gave two sodas each to those the items did reach in the classroom and praised them for standing up to fight for their rights and demand what was their due. However, we also added that next time they should come to the teacher to lay a formal complaint not to put up a fight. As elementary as

this story is, believe me, it will make a lasting impact on those young leaders if this kind of exercises are repeated and are used as leadership training modules for Children. This kind of practical demonstration of the virtue of prudence should be done at all levels of institutions of learning.

The second step towards inculcating the moral value of prudence among Nigerian Christians is to recognize, celebrate and reward people in the community who have demonstrated the virtue of prudence in different positions they have served either as religious leaders or as public servants. It is quite true that we have Biblical exemplars like Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph as models for the virtues of wisdom and prudence but how do people of this age react to these exemplars? Sometimes, they see them only as biblical figures who acquired those virtues because God gave them grace. In the case of Nigeria for instance, where politicians are respected and honored because of their ill-gotten wealth and affluence, there is a need to discourage Christians from giving them places of honor at our church services and liturgical celebrations and create awareness among Christians that this "national bourgeois, the so-called natural leaders, seem to be personally governed more by appetite (insatiable greed) as explicated by Fanon (1963), than reason and training. If this is tenable, as explicated by both Fanon and Achebe and ostensibly corroborated by present realities in Africa, these unjust souls led by appetite, by Plato's standard, are unfit to rule either themselves or others."¹⁸⁴ Frantz Fanon was a Francophone Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist, political philosopher and Marxist, the author of the book titled *The Wretched of the Earth* and Chinua Achebe was a Nigerian novelist, poet and a social critic, the author of the famous African novel "Things Fall Apart." Chinua Achebe's "rejection of the offer of the award of honour of the

¹⁸⁴ Enoch Joseph Aboi, "No Justice, No Progress: Contemporary African Leadership and Society in Plato's Crucible," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 41(2) (2022), 175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2022.2059987>

commander of the federal republic (of Nigeria) was his way of protesting against the environment of corruption and injustice perpetrated by the Nigerian leaders.”¹⁸⁵ Our collective responsibility in disarming these greedy leaders through raising a collective voice against imprudence and social injustices perpetuated by these leaders will go a long way to creating a new Nigeria. Besides, “Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa, and the most populous black nation in the world, is probably also representative of Africa’s problems and potentials; and Nigeria, like most African countries, is held back primarily by leadership failures... a soul-searching self-critique focusing on Africa’s contemporary leadership might contribute to unlocking Africa’s potentials.”¹⁸⁶ These potentials are tied to moral principles and responsibilities.

Adopting Ambrose’s moral and biblical exemplars of prudence will serve as a guide for us to also identify some exemplars in our community and society to imitate. First and foremost, how did Ambrose see the virtue of prudence manifest itself in Abraham and Joseph for instance? In Abraham, Ambrose identified “the fear of the Lord” which was for him the beginning of wisdom for Abraham. Secondly, his total obedience to God and his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac and the careful planning and near execution of his plan without involving his servants was a complete demonstration of prudence. Nigerians should imitate Abraham by first of all developing the conscious presence of God in their lives as it will create in them the fear of the Lord, that is, wisdom. If we have “the fear of the Lord” in us, we will thoughtfully deliberate carefully on our actions before we act. If we strive to practice this virtue of prudence daily in all we do, we will gradually develop our moral reasoning. If one’s moral reasoning is well structured and formed by truth, such a person will be able to make a good moral judgment and decision. However, there are

¹⁸⁵ Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country; A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 249.

¹⁸⁶ Aboi, “No Justice, No Progress,” 175.

some processes involved in making good moral decision in any file of life. For instance, Jaana Woiceshyn in an article on a model for ethical decision making in business highlighted Rest's process of moral decision. This model "describes ethical decision making as consisting of four generic steps: identifying the moral issue, making a moral judgement, establishing moral intent, and engaging in moral action."¹⁸⁷ It is an established fact that Nigeria has a lot of moral problems, and these moral problems have been identified by different people at different times, and some of those moral problems have been highlighted in this chapter. Adopting Ambrose's ethical theories will guide Nigerians through a solid process of moral judgment which will in turn lead to moral intent and action. Therefore, they would bring to light the catholic social teaching of see, judge and act. This catholic mantra of see, judge and act encourages every Christian not to stop at the level of seeing or judging but act by standing for the truth and justice. Christians should always strive to do that which is morally justifiable and for the common good. Christians in Nigeria should imitate Joseph, specifically his virtue of prudence. In Joseph Ambrose saw an exponent of the virtue of wisdom, a wisdom that was not only supernatural but rational. The intimacy Joseph enjoyed with God came out clearly in his wisdom to interpret dreams and also prophesize into the future, plan and execute his plan without revenge or harming others. All Christians may not be endowed with such great wisdom as Joseph but in our little ways and with our commitment to a life of honesty, integrity, moderation, and discipline we impart to others and also create in them the moral discipline of prudence.

Ambrose's exemplars for the virtue of prudence have given us a better understanding of virtue, and these exemplars are considered standard exemplars for Christians. In Africa, the

¹⁸⁷ Jaana Woiceshyn, "A mode for ethical decision making in business: Reasoning, intuition, and rational moral principles," *Journal of Business Ethics* 104 (2011): 312.

example of St Monica and Augustine would be a standard example for parents or mentors who seek to guide young minds towards a life of virtue. Monica the mother of St Augustine displayed great wisdom in following his young son Augustine from one place to another, not giving up on him but guiding him through life with her life of piety and prayers. Monica eventually became an exemplar of wisdom or prudence for her son. Secondly, we have heard this common saying “n Ambrose no Augustine.” Thus, Ambrose’s sermon and teaching inspired the young Augustine and gradually led to his total conversion to Christianity. We can also argue that Ambrose was an exemplar to Augustine.

Having stated these historical facts about Christian exemplars of our time, there are also individuals in our society who have also demonstrated the virtue of prudence in their commitment to the pursuit of happiness for the common good. A good example of a demonstration of wisdom or prudence in the struggle for social justice and equity is Nelson Mandela of South Africa, an exemplar for contemporary Africans and Christians. Nelson Mandela “was born in 1918 in the village of Mvezo in Umtata, then a part of South Africa’s Cape Province. He was a member of the Thembu Royal tribe of South Africa...after his father died when Nelson was nine his mother took him to live with a local Thembu Chief and his wife, who raised him to adulthood. It was during his teen years that he became devoted to Christianity and developed his love for African history.”¹⁸⁸ Mandela picked interest in politics after the boycott of 1943 organized by his friend Gaur Radebe. “Mandela and ten thousand Blacks joined the boycott, which left buses empty for nine days and resulted in fares being rolled back. Mandela learned from this event about the power of the boycott and demonstrated the servant leadership characteristics of building community.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ John Baker and Charles Baker, “Servant Leadership: The Case of Nelson Mandela,” *SAGE Business Case* (SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Case Originals, 2017), 7.

¹⁸⁹ Baker, *Servant Leadership*, 8.

Mandela was actively involved in the liberation of the Black South Africans from the oppressive White Minority. He became a member of the youth league of ANC political party. Thus, “the Youth League formally launched in 1944 and its formation firmly committed Mandela to ANC politics. With these developments, Mandela was beginning to realize that action, not politics, was the only way to lead his people to freedom: that they would never gain equality using the current established methods of formal protest.”¹⁹⁰ One of Mandela’s lawyers at his trial, Sydney Kentridge described Nelson Mandela as “a natural leader of men (people). He was firm, courteous, always based on thought and reason.”¹⁹¹ If there is any word to be used in describing Mandela fittingly it should be prudence. When people think of Mandela, the first thing that comes to their minds is courage. While courage is inevitably visible in the life of Mandela amidst other virtues, one virtue that enabled his outstanding courage was prudence. In his struggle for freedom for Black South Africans Mandela was prudent with his choice of words, protest, writings, and actions. He was able to negotiate South Africa out of crisis and explosion through dialogue, resilience, patience, courage, and more importantly wisdom. Travis Kavulla said this of him, “Mandela was the one who counseled patience. Justice needed to be realized, but realism demanded a slower departure from the status quo ante. Coming to power, he retained virtually all the apartheid-era bureaucracy. The Mandela government sought its famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission which offered those two things, but not the material proceeds of a reckoning.”¹⁹²

A second exemplar who demonstrated great wisdom and prudence in his leadership is Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. His life of moral discipline, prudence, moderation, and equity should be emulated. Thomas Sankara was known for his simplicity, humility, honesty, integrity,

¹⁹⁰ Baker, *Servant Leadership*, 8.

¹⁹¹ Baker, *Servant Leadership*, 9, quoting Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999) 672.

¹⁹² Travis Kavulla, Mandela’s Virtue in *National Review: Politics and Policy*, December 6, 2013.

and courage. In addition to being compassionate to the poor, Sankara had a conscience that was nurtured by truth, and he demonstrated this in his work and leadership skills. Peterson Brian described Sankara as “a polarizing figure whose popularity exposed a generational divide in African politics. At a time of widespread political repression, African elites were threatened by antiestablishment ethos, his crusade against corruption, and his general nonconformity.”¹⁹³ Sankara was pragmatic, prudent, systematic, and courageous in his leadership. Sankara’s virtue of prudence was demonstrated in his charismatic leadership, speeches, and actions, above all, in his reformation model in which he united the people and gave them some sense of duties and responsibility just like Ambrose did for the clergy and religious of his diocese. Sankara’s action was geared toward the common good, he “came to power on August 4, 1983, though through a military coup and wider social protest movement, and he swiftly set his sight on liberating Upper Volta from French neocolonial control. Renaming the country Burkina Faso (Land of Honest People), the new revolutionary state.”¹⁹⁴ He argued for equality of all people (men and women), he stood against imposition of loan on poor African countries by arguing for a non-repayment of IMF (International Monetary Fund) loan imposed on poor African countries, and equally advocated for environmental justice while calling for attention on climate change. He was pragmatic in his leadership style. During his presidency, “he channeled more state resources into health care and education, promoted greater self-reliance, and re-directed his country’s meager resources from the more comfortable urban elites to the impoverished rural population.”¹⁹⁵ Sankara became a pathfinder for the Burkinabe on what real duty and moral responsibility mean. Thus, “for many, his outspokenness and establishment outrage restored a sense of dignity and pride in being

¹⁹³ Brian J. Peterson, *Thomas Sankara: A Revolutionary in Cold War Africa* (Indiana: University Press, 2021), 2.

¹⁹⁴ Peterson, *A Revolution in Cold War*, 2.

¹⁹⁵ Peterson, *A Revolution in Cold War*, 2.

African.”¹⁹⁶ The two exemplars, Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, may fall short of the biblical standard of exemplars in Ambrose’s model of virtues. However, using them as contemporary exemplars for the Christians in Nigeria is to inspire people and encourage them to seek the truth and courageously do what is morally right and honorable. These unique characters, though not perfect, just like Abraham and Jacob in the Bible, learned the virtue of prudence, developed themselves, and became standards for others. Prudence was practically demonstrated in their actions and leadership, which were for the common good and not for their selfish interest. They exhibited a great sense of duty and responsibility towards the masses. Therefore, prudence is not only a prime virtue, it is also a great one that should be desired and learned by all Nigerians if we must change the present situation in Nigeria.

4.3 The Virtue of Fortitude and Its Application among Christians in Nigeria.

Fortitude is the courage of the human soul that enables a person to adopt and adhere to a reasonable course of action when faced with the danger of death or other grave peril irrespective of our religious beliefs. The virtue of courage or fortitude helps us cope with the difficulties of challenges and overcome our limitations as human beings. Ambrose's definition of courage as that which manifests itself in loftiness or greatness of spirit and is equally evident in physical strength has placed our understanding of fortitude in two ways; physical strength and moral strength. This chapter is much more about moral strength in the Nigerian context. When we talk of fortitude we are not looking for courage in a time of war but rather moral courage that repels and resists evil, the courage that fights for justice, and stands against corruption and moral malpractice.

The virtue of fortitude reinforces the appetite against the passion of fear and curbs it in its immoderate stirrings of rashness or fearlessness. Contrasting to it by way of defect is the voice of

¹⁹⁶ Peterson, *A Revolution in Cold War*, 3.

cowardice; and by excess, the vice of foolhardiness. We can on this ground deduce that, there are different ways of demonstrating fortitude as the case might be, or courage and the virtues accompanying it are to be found in the theorists of classical antiquity, in the Bible, and in many other religious writings. It is not possible to coordinate these different usages with precision. Thus, Gauthier argues that:

It is clear that Christianity has assigned greater value to the passive aspect of courage, its willingness to endure suffering or if need be, death in the cause of God's justice, than to the active aspect that is manifest in acts of valor in war and the performance of other great and noble deeds.¹⁹⁷

In Gauthier's opinion, in Christian theology the supreme act of the Christian virtue of fortitude is martyrdom. Christian martyrdom does not seek personal glory or recognition, but an act of heroism that is centered on the love of God and the salvation of one's soul. This, together with the Christian insistence upon gentleness, meekness, clemency, the forgiveness of injury, etc., has served as an excuse for some writers, such as Nietzsche, Marx, and some philosophers to condemn the central idea of Christianity because it has made men unmanly and too ready to suffer evil rather than to fight against it. Without any doubt of mind, there are circumstances in which human virtue calls for vigorous and aggressive action, but it is a mistake to think that Christian morality does not take this into account. The virtue of fortitude itself has two acts: to attack is no less characteristic than to endure. Of these two acts, however, endurance is the more difficult and requires a greater depth of courage, other things being equal. Besides, the fear and the complications involved in endurance must be coped with by sheer virtue.

Taking the current Nigerian situation as a nation into consideration, one can understand that in attacking evil, one has to have at least some hope that he will overcome it, some hope that

¹⁹⁷ David Gauthier, *Moral Dealing* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 487.

he will prove stronger than the threat; but in endurance he submits to an evil that seems stronger than himself. Additionally, the attack is usually of relatively brief duration; but endurance is long and continuous. However, endurance in this context is not to be looked upon as a mere passive approach to danger and suffering; it involves, more importantly, a strong action of the soul holding steadfastly to the good and refusing to yield to fear or pain. The fundamental quality of Christian fortitude in general is conceived as strengthening the soul against the fear of death or analogous affliction. The virtues that are its potential parts, i.e., magnanimity, magnificence, patience, and perseverance, make the soul unwavering when challenged by less important evil.

The above critical analysis on the virtue of fortitude is in agreement with Ambrose's teaching on fortitude, as he clearly stated that courage or fortitude can be demonstrated in either "business of war or in the affairs of domestic life."¹⁹⁸ More so, moral courage requires the training of one's soul against physical danger or external threat. In the face of danger, fear will always be there but the ability to overcome this fear and face imminent danger or threat is the greatness of spirit Ambrose proposes in his virtue theory of fortitude. Ambrose's exemplars of fortitude were discussed and Christians of his time were encouraged to imitate Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph; they remained courageous even in the face of danger. Jacob's wisdom in negotiating with his brother Esau to avert war was also seen as courage, not cowardice. That Abraham fought to defend his nephew Lot from his enemies showed also that Abraham went to war when it was necessary. And David as it was said never went to war without consulting God, neither was Joseph's long-suffering and endurance seen as foolishness but greatness of spirit or moral courage that leads us to choose the right thing and suffer for it rather than to choose the wrong or an evil act in fear of punishment.

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 185.

Christians in Nigeria are faced with persecution from an Islamic set called Boko Haram: Within a span of ten years, mission schools and churches have been attacked, and Catholic priests, protestant and Pentecostal pastors have been kidnapped and killed. In Kaduna State for example, many Catholic priests have been kidnapped, some killed and some are still missing till today. In May 2019, we heard the ugly news of the abduction of Fr John Bako Shekwolo from St Theresa Catholic Church, Fr John has not been found till this moment. There are countless sad stories of Boko Haram's operations and attacks on churches all over Nigeria. However, it is good to state that Boko Haram is not only a threat to Christians but to all Nigerians. And that, "the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria's impoverished and desert north-eastern geopolitical zone, which encompasses the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe, has resulted in horrific instability, poverty, displacement and other hardship."¹⁹⁹ All effort by the Nigerian government to stop this ugly menace has proved abortive. It is sad to say that "this decade-long conflict has resulted in the death of approximately 350 thousand people (between 2015 and 2018), the majority of them are children under the age of five."²⁰⁰ While we expose the evil of Boko Haram, it is also good to trace the root cause of such evil. It is a known fact that "Boko Haram insurgency has been blamed on the high rate of poverty in Nigeria. Its swelling rank is as a result of a huge reservoir of unemployed urban youths from many parts of the country. These youths who have completely become disenfranchised are ready to provide the group with foot soldiers who commit all manners of atrocities."²⁰¹ From the above examples, it is obvious and glaring on how corruption, insecurity and insurgency have contributed greatly to the rate of moral decadence

¹⁹⁹ Onyinye Philip Egbusie, and Albert Oluremi Modupe. "Retroactive Justice and its Implications on Transformative Peace building among Victims of the Boko Haram Terrorism in North-Eastern Nigeria," *International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 7.3 (2022), 2.

²⁰⁰ Egbusie and Modupe, « Retroactive Justice and its Implications on Transformative Peace building, » 2.

²⁰¹ Chukwunonso Akogwu Joseph and Adolphus Nnamdi Uzodigwe, "Boko Haram Insurgency and Distressed Economy in North-Eastern Nigeria: Female Radicalization Experience," *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 3, no, 6 (2020): 20.

in Nigeria. It is not only bad enough but toxic for Christians to live comfortably in this type of society without raising their voices against this evil. It is also obvious that for anyone to stand against this evil, an enormous amount of fortitude or moral courage is demanded of such a person. Therefore, in what ways can Ambrose's teachings on fortitude be a stepping stone for Christians in Nigeria to fight this evil? And what contemporary exemplars of courage do we have within our society? First of all, the Christians in Nigeria should see the fight against oppression and intimidation as a moral responsibility and duty. And since defending the poor and the oppressed is our collective moral responsibility, we must adhere to the cardinal virtue of fortitude, and everyone Christian adult to desire this virtue, learn and master it. Nigerian pastors should devote quality time to teaching about the virtue of courage on Sundays during homilies as against prosperity and miracles.

The second step is to train our minds and strengthen our souls to stand against corruption and evil in Nigeria. The sensitization and training of people, especially young adults, on the approach to be used in confronting corrupt leaders in our society can either be done through public symposiums, daily newspapers, or by peaceful protest or picketing. Ambrose has already given us great exemplars in the Bible. We also have exemplars within the African society and even within Nigeria, of people who have demonstrated the virtue of greatness of spirit that we can imitate. The first exemplar is Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. He was born October 7, 1931 in Klerksdorp, South Africa. Desmond's father was a school teacher and his grandfather was a minister in African Independent Church. This is the background from which this noble son of African emerged. As a young student of theology, studying for the Anglican priesthood, "Tutu embraced the values of the community of the resurrection (Local Church Community), especially

its identity with the oppressed.”²⁰² On March 21, 1960, South Africans witnessed the tragedy of Sharpeville, where police opened fire on innocent protesters “killing at least 69 people and wounded 180, including women and children. Most of the victims were shot in the back as they tried to flee. This massacre sent shock waves throughout South Africa and the rest of the world.”²⁰³ Desmond Tutu was in the seminary when this tragedy happened, he heard about the shooting on the radio and felt a deep sense of shock, sadness, and helplessness.”²⁰⁴ He was however, inspired by the action of Bishop Ambrose Reeves who “led the public outcry over the shooting”²⁰⁵ but was deported from South Africa. This moment became a moment of decision for Tutu, and after his ordination to the priesthood he started his work among the poor and the oppressed, he began his fight for justice, equality and freedom. Desmond Tutu was sent to London, he studied and ministered in London for some years and enjoyed freedom for the first time in his entire life. However, this was cut short when he was appointed the Bishop and Dean of Johannesburg in 1974. The decision to leave the cool and undisturbed life in Britain was hard for him and his family but finally, Tutu returned to South Africa in 1975. The first Black South African Bishop and a Dean was offered a privilege of living “in the dean’s official residence in Houghton, one of Johannesburg’s wealthiest white suburbs. But the Tutus broke with tradition and chose to live in Soweto instead, the huge black township southwest of Johannesburg.”²⁰⁶ Desmond Tutu’s choice of living among the poor was a demonstration of prudence and also moral courage as this choice of his became the beginning of his many fights for equality and freedom. First of all, Bishop Tutu “knew that he was more visible as dean of Johannesburg than he had ever been before. He sought

²⁰² Steven D. Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 25.

²⁰³ Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography*, 26.

²⁰⁴ Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography*, 27.

²⁰⁵ Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography*, 27.

²⁰⁶ Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography*, 58.

to use his leadership position as the platform to speak out against injustice.”²⁰⁷ Desmond Tutu, demonstrated courage through his teaching, preaching, and writing. He submits that “being neutral when faced with injustice was to accept injustice.”²⁰⁸ Desmond Tutu was not only courageous but prudent and modest in his approach to fighting injustices and apartheid. Tutu is a great exemplar for contemporary priests, pastors, and Christians in Nigeria. Tutu’s greatness of spirit is more visible in his approach to peace and reconciliation. When the apartheid period in South Africa ended and Mandela became its first black president, one will suppose that Tutu and Mandela will take the lead in revenge and retaliation against the white South Africans. Surprisingly, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace were their gifts to all South Africans and by extension to Nigerians. Desmond Tutu remains a great exemplar of courage and counted “among the most prominent national denominational leaders who took courageous stances...whose championing of nonviolent resistance won him the Nobel Prize in 1984. He also at times served as a mediator and was called upon to chair the National Truth and reconciliation commission in the immediate post-apartheid period”²⁰⁹ “Tutu is an exemplar of a Christian leader who besides living virtuously, also participated in public services by using his religious belief and faith to teach and practice the virtue of courage. Desmond Tutu was known for preaching fearlessly against injustice and social inequality in South Africa and beyond. Tutu advocated for moral courage to say no to evil rather violence and revenge. According to our study of Ambrose this does not suggest cowardice but rather wisdom and greatness of spirit. Nigerian Christians and leaders should emulate Archbishop Tutu by being courageous, peace-loving, and law abiding. This also means that we could fight

²⁰⁷ Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography*, 61.

²⁰⁸ Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography*, 61, quoting Tutu, *Hope and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 36-39

²⁰⁹ Cynthia Sampson, “Religion and Peacebuilding,” in *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*, eds. I. William Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 295.

corruption and injustices without war and bloodshed. Despite Tutu's privilege position as an Archbishop and being a comfortable black South African, he never pitched his tent with the powerful white nor the angry and aggressive black South Africans. At the funeral of Steve Biko, a young and vibrant South African in September 25, 1977, Tutu in his sermon "set the tone for the whole sermon. His opening word reveal a dialogical, embracing starting point. He identified with the mourning multitude by using 'we,' articulating the stunned disbelief of the whole black community and affirming their anger and impatience with injustice."²¹⁰ Dialogue and negotiation is another practical example of how to apply Ambrose's virtue ethics. Ambrose suggests that Jacob's wisdom in sending his servants to negotiate with Esau while Esau was advancing to attack him was a demonstration of wisdom and greatness of spirit not a sign of cowardice. Therefore, it is advisable most times to work for peace and reconciliation rather than go into a senseless war. Tutu like Jacob will prefer dialogue and negotiation than senseless war and fight. Ambrose calls such dialogue and negotiation wisdom. In any act of courage there should be wisdom underneath. In all, in the sermon, Tutu identified himself as one of the people 'who today still advocate peaceful change and still talk about reconciliation and justice' goals at which his praxis was aimed."²¹¹ Religious leaders in Nigeria, besides their role as preachers, should be bridge builders and ambassadors of unity. We make a lasting impact on the people and in society if we open our doors and hearts to everyone whether we share the same faith or not. These four lessons of Tutu can be incorporated into our pedagogy of faith-building.

In Nigeria, we have had great men and women who also have demonstrated greatness of spirit or courage and moral discipline that can also serve as exemplars for contemporary Nigerians.

²¹⁰ Johannes N. J. Kritzing, "Mission in prophetic dialogue," *Missiology* 41.1 (2013), 43.

²¹¹ Kritzing, "Mission in prophetic dialogue," 44.

In the voice of *Courage*, a publication done in honor of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a pan-African leader of the Western Nigerian Region, he was described as “a man who is not only firm, bold and daring, but one who has the courage, whenever the need arises, to withstand persecution with saintly fortitude and strength.”²¹² In the history of Nigeria, Obafemi “is the only Nigerian political leader who has ever summoned up the courage to relinquish a high political office on grounds of conscience only.”²¹³ It was strange to many Nigerians when he resigned from General Yakubu Gowon’s cabinet as a vice chairman and commissioner for finance. The ability to resign from a position of honor is important if such a position does not help you to achieve your ethical values and that of society. In the area of social justice and the ability to confront evil with fortitude, Gani Fawehinmi is another exemplar of the virtue of fortitude or greatness of spirit. Gani was well known for his courageous fight against injustice and corrupt practices. He was arrested and imprisoned by the government of Nigeria many times for speaking publicly against the injustice and oppression of the poor. Gani was never scared of being arrested and detained. Olukayode Ajulo in *Daily Trust*, Nigeria, in his tribute on the contributions of Gani, asks Nigerians of this age to emulate and “draw a lesson from the life and times of this giant of humanity who in time, exemplified with true candour, the finer virtues of integrity, courage and compassion.”²¹⁴ Gani even in his fight for a morally just society never advocated for violence or war. Everything was done with prudence and moderation, and yet the impact of his struggle for a better and moral society has no equal. The above exemplars were never men of war or physical strength yet with

²¹² Olaiya Fagbamigbe, *The Voice of Courage: Selected Speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo vol.2* (Akure, Nigeria: Fagbamigbe Publishers, 1981), v.

²¹³ Fagbamigbe, *The Voice of Courage*, v.

²¹⁴ Olukayode Ajulo and Gani Fawehinmi, “Remembering His Contributions,” *Daily Trust*, September 15, 2015.3;56.

their calm presence, voice, wisdom, and peaceful demonstration they were able to change so many people, and even society to a great extent.

We have looked at fortitude or courage from the social-political angle, and the corresponding exemplars concerning the Nigerian context. A demonstration of fortitude that is encapsulated in a strong faith in God and deep conviction in doing what is right and just is Leah Sharibu, “Miss Sharibu is one of the 111 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram from the dormitories of Government Girls Science Technical College (GGSTC) in the Northern Yobe State Dapchi on February 19, 2018. Till the time of writing she is being detained by the terrorists for refusing to denounce her Christian faith.”²¹⁵ It is bad enough that the Nigerian government couldn't protect this poor girl from being kidnapped, but worse still that she could not be rescued from the hands of her abductors due to a failure of national security. However, that Leah Sharibu refused to give up her faith in God and turned down an offer that was against her wish is not only inspiring but worthy of emulation. Sharibu has demonstrated not just the greatness of spirit but a true display of a trained soul that has reinforced its appetite against the passion of danger or fear of death, a passion that increased in her the yearning for Christian martyrdom that is devoid of personal glory. The courage of Leah Sharibu in remaining firm against intimidation from her abductors even when the other 110 girls were released to go home should be an example for young people of Nigeria to emulate. Leah, though young, is making a sacrifice that speaks to the hearts of many Christians in Nigeria. Leah has demonstrated an awesome greatness of spirit, and she is a great exemplar for all of us.

²¹⁵ Adamkolo Mohammed Ibrahim, Hajara Umar Sanda, and Aisha Kola Lawan, “The Role of Media in Exposing Violation of Child’s Rights and Gender Abuse by Boko Haram Terrorists in Nigeria,” *e-BANGI Journal* 16.5 (2019), 6.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Ambrose of Milan was not only a statesman, a pastor, a philosopher, and a theologian but more importantly, an ethicist who blended his knowledge of ancient philosophical virtue theory with that of Christianity. His work, *De Officiis Ministrorum* is a masterpiece of his virtue theory and one of the most influential moral works in the history of Christianity. Ambrose's literary model, *De Officiis* of Cicero was addressed to Marcus his son who was studying philosophy in Athens with the expectation of good behavior from him by his father. Nevertheless, it was believed that Cicero "was determined to make his voice heard among all young Romans with aspiration to a public life... he hoped there might be a renaissance of sound leadership, if the rising generation could acquire a due sense of social responsibility and demonstrate a proper dedication to a noble causes like advocacy and popular generosity."²¹⁶ To put it more succinctly, *De Officiis* according to Ivor Davidson "is designed as a kind of 'manual of civic virtue' the advice of a self-consciously illustrious elder to all potential young leaders in age of upheaval, explaining how the old political values might yet flourish once more."²¹⁷ In the same vein, Ambrose's *De Officiis Ministrorum* is an ecclesiastical document or manual on duties (virtue) addressed to the clergy, religious, and Christians in Milan.

Ambrose's virtue theory highlighted the cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance) as moral principles or guides for the Christians of his era. However, Ambrose according to Davidson "completely repudiates a classical idea in favor of a higher, Christian, principle."²¹⁸ There is no doubt in Ambrose's mind that biblical records offer reliable historical accounts. Therefore, Ambrose's usage of biblical exemplars, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph,

²¹⁶ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 7.

²¹⁷ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 7.

²¹⁸ Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, trans. 24.

Moses, and David, and the exemplar of Jesus's sacrificial love in Paul's narrative in the New Testament changed the narrative of virtue theory for the Christians. Thus, having explored Ambrose's virtue theory, specifically his views on prudence and fortitude, it is important to state that Ambrose's teaching on prudence and fortitude is relevant and important to contemporary Christians in Nigeria. Besides, it is a *sine qua non* that these two virtues be taught from elementary schools to tertiary institutions. Secondly, religious leaders, teachers, traditional moral instructors, and all those involved in the formation of young people should see it as their obligation and moral responsibility to teach and practice these virtues in whatever positions they are been given. For those in leadership and those aspiring to be in public offices, rethinking Ambrose's theory of prudence and courage or greatness of spirit will be a step in the right direction.

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