

Shall the sun ever rise on South Africa's new dawn?

A missiology of hope redefined¹

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Abstract

In his book, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, Gevisser laments the demise of the African Renaissance dream, which many had envisaged during the presidency of former-President Thabo Mbeki. In light hereof, this article demonstrates that it is in the habit of leaders to launch their political dispensations with catchphrases that intend to inspire change, hope and prosperity. This is the basis of this phenomenological study, which focuses on five critically important concepts, namely, *renaissance*, *new dawn*, *rebirth*, *reincarnation* and *resurrection*, which have deep affinity in meaning and use. These concepts are defined, missiological scrutinised and hypothetically applied to the dwindling hope of South Africa's socio-political future. The article attempts to answer a persistent question of whether there is any hope under the current President Cyril Ramaphosa's "new dawn". Concluding this conceptual inquiry is a set of probing questions and proposals that suggest pathways out of this quagmire.

Keywords new dawn, renaissance, rebirth, born again, reincarnation and resurrection

1. Introduction

As part of their accidence to power, many visionary leaders have coined slogans, phrases or idioms that intend to characterise their leadership. Similarly, for institutions or commercial entities that had experienced a slump, when they reopen to the public, the word "new" becomes a common qualifier, such as in the phrase "under new management". Politically, at the dawn of the post-apartheid era, the National Party changed its name to the New National Party (NNP). "Through its new name, the NNP was trying to disassociate itself from its very own 50-year record of apartheid politics, painting itself instead as a moderate, non-racial federal party suitable for love and affection from the more politically naïve or credulous" (Rice 2010). Furthermore, the post-apartheid South Africa came to

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be better known as “Nelson Mandela’s New South Africa” (GCIS-Editor 2018). In the same light, it was conceivable for former President Thabo Mbeki to flight his political campaign under his own unique flagship, namely, the “African Renaissance”. Lately, in the same vein, the current president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, has characterised his tenure as the “new dawn”. Churches, too, have done likewise; for instance, the New Apostolic Church, homesteads and townships are notably akin to this practice, for example, Qalabotjha (Google Maps 2021) (South Sotho for ‘a fresh start’), a township in the Fezile Dabi Municipality, near Villiers, in the Free State Province.

It may now be asked why there is a desire to speak of “new” each time an institution, management, or leadership is established at the beginning of an era. It may be presumptuous to suggest that it is an attempt to revitalise a struggling or defunct organisation because there is more to it than meets the eye. The propensity to inspire new life, it would seem, lies in the use of critical and dynamic words. This article investigates five words with deep religious, social, political and economic meanings. I scrutinise them with the aim of understanding their use in the discourse of charismatic leaders they inspire and hatching trajectories of new hope. These are “rebirth”, “reincarnation”, “renaissance”, “resurrection”, and “new dawn”. I discuss these concepts with a focus on Africa and a special reference to South Africa. Therefore, any mention of the concept African Renaissance should be understood in the extended light of its bifocal application to Africa and South Africa.

2. Problematising the discourse

The problem setting of this discourse is the failure of African states to attain self-sustainable, long-lasting independence. This independence should be understood similarly to what was coined by the missiologist duo Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson of the three-selves fame, namely, self-governance, self-support and self-propagation (Shenk 1990). To this was added a fourth self, self-theologising (Bosch 1991, 451–452). The ever-increasing odds stacked against African countries militate against the claims of independence the African states celebrate on their annual calendars. There is always a struggle, if not a lack of will, in one or more of these four selves in the manner the African states are run.

3. Methodological design and Research questions

In an attempt to unravel this debacle, I propose applying critical theory on the state of Africa as a continent under the four concepts I selected above. The fundamental question I ask is, Why is it that African states hit a ditch when much is expected of them in terms of self-governance, self-propagation, self-support and self-conceptualisation? How do current political authorities enable their countries to jump out of

the groove, if not grave, they are stuck in, and begin to carve new futures for their subjects and future generations in a sustainable way?

In order to answer these questions, I have resolved to critique the five concepts, some of which have been the mainstay of Africa's promising political leaders. The objective of this study, after all, is to inspire critical self-examination and engender a new sense of hope for incumbent African leaders or their future generations. I will, however, not attempt to discuss the challenges African states face because of the limitations of this discussion but refer you elsewhere where that is done elaborately (cf. Banda 2010:28-40).³

I will first discuss the closely-related concepts of 'rebirth' and 'born again' as a precursor to the other concepts.

4. Convergence in New dawn, Rebirth and Renaissance concepts

The concept of "rebirth", also known in French as *renaissance*, has deep theological connotations. The term "renaissance" cascades into a long list of several synonymous concepts. These include newness of life, metempsychosis, conversion, regeneration, revitalisation, to be born again, reincarnation, renewal, refurbishment, restoration, reformation, enlightenment, renascence, spiritual rebirth, transition, rectify, rejuvenate, reclaim, re-establish, repair, correct, amend, domesticate, domesticate, remedy, doctor, fix, reinstate, resituate, crystallise, illuminate and straighten out (Answers.com 2009).

By advancing this long list of synonyms, I intend to draw attention to the many negative descriptions Africa has endured under various critics. My objective is to address and dispel the afro-pessimistic perceptions, attitudes or the melodramatic negative spirit the continent has had to contend with over the years. In appropriating these terms, I should be able to provide tools useful in the search for solutions necessary for our age. One way that is close to African thought is to use such images that try to represent a problem or a solution. Therefore, in the next paragraphs, I will explore a few of these images in the context of Africa's rebirth.

5. Appraising images of a new dawn and rebirth

Images and symbols have powerful meanings for those who use them. In Africa, this is no exception. Many images are taken from nature and phenomena of nature's diverse elements, for instance, Mbiti on "death and reincarnation" (cf. Mbiti 1969:145) and Credo Mutwa's image gallery (Mutwa n.d.). These illustrations demonstrate the quest for a deeper understanding of "rebirth". It is helpful

³ While the reality of these facts still hold, updates are necessary in light of recent developments.

to understand the renaissance from some of Africa's many imageries and pictorial language, thereby trying to derive compatible lasting solutions.

In certain Southern African cultures, such as the Bapedi,⁴ as depicted in the traditional song, "*Letšatši ke khumagadi*", a new day is a form of rebirth. The rise of the sun across the eastern horizon occasions a fresh new day. In places where the horizon is formed by a stretch of a body of water, such as Lake Malawi, when the sun rises in the morning, it is viewed as resurfacing from the depth of the sea where it was taking a bath. It is perhaps one of the reasons why the new parliament under former President Joyce Banda reversed former President Mutharika's "unilateral" decision to change the old flag's rising sun, which depicted a new dawn (Smith 2012). According to other cultures (such as *the amaNdebele people* of the Free State Province), the sun is viewed as a "divine eye", which during the run of the day, sees the activities of human beings. Many of these activities are episodes of misery, such as death, wars, disease, evil, etc. Therefore, the rising "born again sun" from "the depth of the sea" is likened to the eye that has been cleansed from yesterday's sad journey across the sky and rises with a new sense of hope.

Another relevant imagery is the mythical Egyptian story of the Phoenix. It is "a fabulous bird associated with the worship of the sun ... [at the end of its 500 years lifespan] ... the dying phoenix fly to Heliopolis [Heliopolis, a Latinised Greek word meaning "The City of the Sun" an ancient city in Egypt, no part of the city of Cairo (Britannica Encyclopaedia 2016)] and immolate itself in the altar fire, from which the young phoenix then rose ... It was also widely interpreted as an allegory of resurrection and life after death—ideas that also appealed to emergent Christianity" (Britannica Encyclopaedia n.d.). According to other sources, "the symbolic meaning for a phoenix is beauty, rebirth, renewal, a new beginning or a fresh start" (Answers.com, n.d.). A linear comparison of the sun in the mythical story of the phoenix and the symbolism attached to it concur with many other African resemblances of the role of the sun as an element of perpetual renewal and a fresh start. A sense of hope reverberates throughout these representations.

A new day might bring new life and possibilities devoid of the past's calamities. It is in this sense, therefore, that I explore the notion of the sunshine of a new day as a symbol or image that represents the newness of life. This encourages us to further explore other concepts of rebirth with which the African Renaissance can be associated, hooked, synchronised, remixed⁵ and "replayed".

⁴ A line in the lyrics of this Sepedi traditional song reads, "Letšatši ke khumagadi; mosetsana o tšwa botlhaba-tšatši..." (literally: The sun is the queen, the young woman rises from the east ...)

⁵ Nel (2015) has borrowed 'remix' from its musical milieu, to show missiologically, the interplay of phe-

6. Reincarnation as a multidimensional beacon of hope

The concept of “reincarnation” is considered to have its foundations in oriental religions (Reincarnation 2023a). By definition, “reincarnation”, also called “transmigration” or “metempsychosis” in religion and philosophy, is the rebirth of the aspect of an individual that persists after bodily death—whether it be consciousness, mind, the soul, or some other entity—in one or more successive existences” (Britannica Encyclopaedia 2022). As a doctrine or a metaphysical belief, it holds that “some essential part of a living being . . . survives death to be reborn in a new body” (Reincarnation 2009). An overview of religions on this matter indicates that all major oriental belief systems, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Taoism, have it as one of their tenets. “Reincarnation” is also found among Western religions and traditions, among which are, namely, ancient Greek philosophy, Christianity, Gnosticism, Judaism, Islam, Native American nations, Norse mythology, Naturalism and Zoroastrianism (Reincarnation 2009). In contemporary thought and faith systems, it is found, among others, the modern thinkers, Anthroposophy, Theosophy, Scientology, Edgar Cayce, Eckankar and the New Age Movement (Reincarnation 2009). Furthermore, the concept exists among Indian and Western popular cultures and some scientific research works which, however, do not have conclusive evidence on the matter (Reincarnation 2009).

Let me examine the facets of this concept closely, but lift only those relevant to my discussion.

6.1 Reincarnation as continuity versus discontinuity

At the heart of reincarnation is the notion of continuity. This continuity has various intricacies according to each faith system. Among the Buddhists, continuity can be explained as “a sequence of related lives stretching over a very long time” (Incar-nation 2009). There is also a belief that claims that some individuals, whatever the circumstances of their birth, are recognised as having a special destiny in a manner that is different from other human beings. Among those recognised as having a special destiny is the renowned Dalai Lama (Judge 2004). Among Tibetan Buddhists, it is rare to be reborn in the immediate next life as a human being. Good deeds and a positive state of mind at the time of death create this possibility. This peaceful mind at death stimulates a “virtuous seed” and, subsequently, a fortunate rebirth. On the contrary, a disturbed mind or a state of anger at death stimulates a non-virtuous seed and, therefore, an unfortunate rebirth (Reincarnation 2009).

The notion of continuity is also consistent with, among others, Hinduism, Jainism, and especially Taoism which believe that “birth is not a beginning; death is not an end

nomena that are brought up from a past life and given a renewed life and meaning, and subsequent influence on current life’s relevant issues.

... [but, life] is presented as existence without limitation” (Wikipedia 2009/Incarnation). According to Buddhism, there are, however, limiting factors, namely, *anattra* and *ātman*, which when explained in simple terms, mean “at the death of one personality, a new one comes into being, much as the flame of a dying candle can serve to light the flame of another” (Reincarnation 2009). This means there is no permanent and unchanging identity. Though, with Jainism and Sikhism, the possibility of one person or soul being incarnated into a lesser being is great and depends on one's *karmas* (deeds). For instance, evil actions, sinful deeds, and failure to remember the Creator (and unless absolved by the Almighty God, according to the Sikh) may lead to being incarnated into “lower” life forms such as snakes, ghosts, animals, etc. (Incarnation 2009).

According to the above notions, the reincarnation of the African Renaissance or Africa's renewal has several implications. Firstly, continuing on the path of good and worthy deeds is essential for the African dream. We need a “virtuous seed” to engender a sense of hope and continued reconstruction of the continent. Perhaps the past glory cannot be regained in full; however, a “new identity” for Africa can be forged; an identity that seeks to achieve even “higher” forms of life. In the case of the African Renaissance, it is the proponents of democracy and good governance, accountability, value and respect for human life and general prosperity for humanity and other forms of life in the ecosystem whose *karmas* (deeds) can stimulate and bolster continuation on the “virtuous seed” of life and hope. However, it is in the bad leaders of Africa that the non-virtuous seed and, subsequently, unfortunate rebirth of social misfits is perpetuated.

The controversy with the doctrine of reincarnation, as found in the Hindu incarnation version of *moksha*, is where a person's *karma* reaches a state of perfection that the person becomes one with the divinity (*Brahman*) or continues into eternity in the presence of the supreme being (e.g., *Krishna*). This evokes criticism similar to the one levelled against Christianity by the pan-Africanists in which they accuse Christians of advocating a position of “seek ye first the kingdom of heaven”, which they argue was a ploy by European Christian missionaries who fixed the eyes of Africans “onto the heavens” while the colonial powers and greed dug down “into the earth” to enrich themselves with minerals, such as gold and diamonds. On the contrary, “heaven” or Utopia, like that taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses described by Crites (2020) as “an ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects” (cf. also Holden 2003), is what many Africanists would want to see. Secondly, on another positive side, the notion of continuity, not of the same “identities”, but of one moment giving rise to the other embedding the same values is an idea to be explored next.

6.2 Reincarnation as an evolving consciousness

One critical notion of incarnation is that of an “evolving consciousness” or “stream of consciousness”. This is a Buddhist teaching which states that “what is reborn is

not the person but that one moment gives rise to another and that this momentum continues, even after death” (Incarnation 2009); I find this critical regarding how movements and institutions tend to be attached and confined to individuals. The concept of the African Renaissance has been closely associated with Thabo Mbeki. Subsequently, it came as no surprise that the question of whether there was an African Renaissance after Thabo Mbeki was asked.⁶ Such questions always arise when a specific concept is intricately intertwined with a particular “person”. If African Renaissance can be assumed in the light of this “stream of consciousness” or “evolving consciousness”, I am assured that likewise, the dream and the institutions of the African Renaissance will experience one-moment giving rise to another. It will offset a momentum that continues even after the death of the most notable of the protagonists of the African Renaissance movement. In this sense, “Buddhism shares with Hinduism the doctrine of Samsara, whereby all beings pass through an unceasing cycle of birth, death and rebirth until they find a means of liberation from the cycle” (Trainor 2004:58). However, this momentum should not be in the form of Tibetan Buddhist incarnation where there’s no immediate rebirth. In fact, the seed of the African Renaissance was conceived in the early 20th Century by Pixley Isaka ka Seme and the like-minded (Banda 2010:50-51), but died with them only to re-emerge decades later in recent years. It is only fair to ask, Will the current fervour of rebirth also die out? The concept of evolving consciousness in the Buddhist reincarnation should be treasured and nurtured lest the current euphoria around the African’s hope for renewal flickers away and finally dies out, to become a dream that never was.

6.3 Reincarnation as a Christian concept

The concept of reincarnation among Christians was found in early Christian history among the Gnostics. Since they believed the material was evil and that their “good” souls were held captive in the “evil” bodies, “reincarnation” was held in a negative sense (Wikipedia/Resurrection 2009). However, the term “reincarnation” does not exist in the Bible. In fact, such a possibility is refuted by appealing to some verses in the Old and New Testament (cf. Eccl. 9:5-6⁷ and Luke 16:20-31⁸) (Wikipedia/Resurrection 2009). Some observers argue that the Bible points to reincarnation

⁶ Soon after Thabo Mbeki was deposed as president of the Republic of South Africa, in 2007, Mark Gevisser published a voluminous book titled, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, in reference to the ‘African Renaissance dream’;

⁷ Eccl. 9:6 “[The dead...also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun]”;

⁸ In this “beyond-the grave” story the rich man implores Abraham to send Lazarus to his next-of-kin to warn them of the torment of hell; Abraham rejects the request and points to the “living” Moses and Prophets as modes of communication of the Gospel with the living;

when referring to 1) The return of Elijah to which Jesus points in a concealed manner to the coming of John the Baptist (cf. Mark 9:13⁹). This argument is refuted on the basis that Elijah never actually died but was taken to heaven alive¹⁰; and 2) The resurrections of Jesus from the dead (Matthew 28:1ff, cf.28:17¹¹); similarly of Lazarus (John 11:17) and Dorcas (Acts 9:40) are New Testament testimonies to the resurrection. The phenomena here underline the differences between reincarnation (which is rebirth into a *new* person) and resurrection (which is the return to a life of the same grown-up body in conditions similar to those of the body immediately before its death). According to some, Jesus' resurrection was different and could be viewed as an "apparition" (Incarnation 2009).

Therefore, I conclude that an argument for Christian reincarnation is a subject of controversy, especially since "the overwhelming majority of mainstream Christian denominations reject the notion of reincarnation and considers its conception to challenge the basic tenets of their beliefs" (Incarnation 2009). While these concepts are interesting in themselves, I it is the metaphors that arise out of them that I hope will engender and strengthen the campaign for the realisation of a new "dream" of a renewed Africa, in general, and a renewed South Africa in particular. Next, let us consider the concept of "resurrection" which is close to reincarnation.

7. Resurrection towards a new life

By definition, "resurrection" means the "raising from the dead of beings, especially human beings" (Resurrection 2009). Unlike with "reincarnation" where the principal concept is "transmigration", with "resurrection", the same "person" is raised again to life. This is irrespective of whatever form the body takes. Let us explore a few of the teachings and notions on resurrections.

7.1 Resurrection among Christians

The resurrection of dead humans is held by many religions but is a central doctrine of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Wikipedia 2009/Resurrection). There are few Biblical stories which tell of persons who, as a result of God's miraculous workings, rose to life again. In the Old Testament, there is, for instance, a widow's son who was resurrected by Elisha (cf. 2 Kgs 4:32-35)¹² and a man who returned to life when he touched Prophet Elisha's bones in the tomb.¹³ Of all these episodes, it is the

⁹ Mark 9:13 "But I tell you, Elijah has come, ..."; Luke 1:17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah;

¹⁰ 2 King 2:11 "... and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven";

¹¹ Matt. 28:17: When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

¹² 2Kgs 8:5: Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life.

¹³ 2Kgs 13:21: "... so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet."

resurrection of Jesus Christ that gained unsurpassed credence. Its acceptance as a fact has even found its way into the calendars of many nations of the world as an official public holiday in the form of Easter Sunday. Encapsulated in the concept of “resurrection” are its promises of new life. Apostle Paul, in a nutshell, likens resurrection to a planted seed which sheds its old “body” for a new one, in a most glorious, picturesque (1Cor.15:42-43). The striking dichotomy painted by Paul: corruption to incorruption; dishonour to glory and weakness to power, illustrates the dialectical breakthrough from the old to the new life occasioned by resurrection. The socio-economic slump experienced in South Africa certainly inspires thoughts of a resurrection of Paul’s prophetic imagination. An important element of the belief in the resurrection is the role of an external force which only can bring about such a radical transformation. Thus, hope in a renewed South Africa modelled against these Biblical concepts is subject to a course of faith and divine intervention.

7.2 Empirical claims of resurrections

Apart from faith traditions, some sources claim to have records of credible incidents of people rising from the dead. Among others, Father Alfred J Herbert (in Resurrection 2009) claims 400 true stories of resurrection, and Raymond Moody (1977)¹⁴ claims as a practising medical practitioner to have observed several patients clinically certified dead coming back to life. The infamous African tragic story of prophetess Nongqawuse of the “great Xhosa cattle-killing movement of 1856-57”) has as one of the terms of prophecy, “the dead would arise” (South African History Online n.d.). While this story evokes emotions and controversies of all sorts [Samples] my focus is the ‘resurrection of the dead’ as a trading item for the killing of the cattle. It is uncertain whether the notion of “resurrection” in this episode was a Christian influence by her uncle, Mhlakaza, after he met with Christians in the Cape Colony. Of vital interest is the link made by Nongqawuse’s prophecy between “resurrection” replenished granaries, kraals filled with “more beautiful and healthier cattle” (Peires 1987) and the sweeping of the British settlers into the sea. It is clear what the positive prospects of “resurrection” hold as a new phase of renewed life and its future.

In the discussion above, I do not seek to establish the veracity of the stories nor argue for “resurrection” as a fact, but appreciate the claims of the texts for what they purport as fact.

As a Christian, though, this would be the premise of my faith and my point of departure. However, for the purposes of this study, in this section, I identify characteristics of resurrection that could be transported into the concept of renaissance and

¹⁴ Raymond Moody was professionally a medical practitioner.

thereby remodel the African Renaissance accordingly. What has come out clearly about the resurrection, especially that which is relevant to this discussion, is that resurrection epitomises the notions of hope, resuscitation, new life and a new era.

7.3 Hope as a crucial tenet of resurrection

All accounts of resurrection cannot help but have an element of hope. This hope is not only carried in the human species, but nature has also taught us to find it in seeds, bulbs, roots and other animal species. In both the animal and plant kingdoms, there are intriguing life forms that point to the resurrection. Although not entirely true to the classical understanding of resurrection, hibernation is an interesting and relevant phenomenon. During winter or seasons of drought (the absence of life's support systems), some animals, like frogs, would go into a state of hibernation as if "buried and dead", but come the rainy season, the rivers and ponds fill with water, then "miraculously" these waters would be teeming with new life the evening atmosphere bellows with the sounds of frogs. In the plant kingdom, the one exciting miracle is the "Resurrection Plant", which would shrivel to death because of drought, but with a little touch of water, it would instantly sprout to life. These natural phenomena, too, as metaphors of death and resurrection are aimed to make us think of the African Renaissance in terms of resuscitation to life. Africa must respond positively to life-giving stimuli. The worrying question is how long should aspirants of hope wait for the "rain season". Of the "current clouds" that promise rain, which of them are saturated with droplets of water that will fill the dry plains of misery and destitute across the landscape of the African continent and South Africa? Africa has waited too long while dictators and corrupt officials pillage her resources, and apathy, negative attitudes, actions and lifestyle among its people continue to undermine the messages of hope and the call to rise from "the dead". I need to ask with the Sovereign Lord, "Can these [dry] bones [of Africa] live?" (cf. Ezek. 37:3).

Resurrection as a human experience, whether in the Bible, in folklore stories, in scientific accounts or in prophecies, it appeals strongly to humanity's sense of hope; hope of meeting the deceased in a near or distant future life. This deep sense of expectation is also a direct motivation for the living to take part in actions that will ensure their resurrection, for their own good, but also with the hope of meeting their deceased loved ones [cf. 1 Cor. 15: 58: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain"].¹⁵ Resurrection as

¹⁵ This statement is motivated by the act of resurrection in 1 Cor. 15: 54, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

renewal, therefore, inculcates a “never say die” spirit over against that which sees life culminating in the “dead and buried”. On the contrary, it is a spirit that is invigorated by new possibilities in life.

We should consider as fatalistic the attitudes of people who are living for the “here and now”. In the sense of the ancient adage, “Let’s eat and drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” (Isa. 22:13). These words are preceded by remarks of extravagant, self-deceptive attitude found in the words, “But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine”! “Let us eat and drink” you say, “for tomorrow we die”! (Isa. 22:13). The modern licentious lifestyle with many politicians, community and business leaders and many youth who when they get into power and access to riches, wallow in pitiful extravagance, consequently running down their countries into poverty. Resurrection means there is life “after-all”, and there is going to be accountability, judgment and reprisals. It also means that the past comes back either to laud us for managing our lot responsibly for the sake of generations that come after us or it comes back to haunt us for our failures.

7.4 Forging new life from the old, dead and buried

One of the nostalgic feelings of resurrection is the possibility of meeting the “old” persons. In many fine arts and music works, this sentiment is often represented through forms depicting hope.¹⁶ It is evident among certain African communities in their internment of their dead; there was an expectation of the life beyond or their return to life. According to the Basotho of southern Africa, the dead would be buried with seeds of crops, and warriors with weapons, in anticipation of the life “hereafter” or resurrection. In more active, celebratory practices of the Malagasy people, during the ritual called, *Famadihana*, what BBC (2016) calls “Dancing with the dead”, the Malagasies exhume their family relatives after five to seven years of burial, rewrap them in new shrouds, and carry their remains overhead to the streets to the musical sounds of drums and trumpets. A family spokesperson proudly explains how the event is an expression of love and reunion with their loved ones. While some may regard this practice as absurd and exposure to diseases and infections,¹⁷ it may be a subject of interest to forensic pathologists and archaeologists. However, the archaeological research in Egyptian pyramids has taken the ‘reunion’ of the living and the dead to an ever-increasing importance. The Egyptians did not only mummify the Pharaohs and other high-profile people, but also kept their important treasures in their “graves”

¹⁶ Brook Benton’s famous musical track, “I dreamt of a city called heaven”, fantasies on the moment when he would be meeting Jesus and other saints of old; and he will express his gratitude for salvation (Benton 1971).

¹⁷ During the 2017 plague in Madagascar, which killed 100 people, the health official condemned and prevented the *Famadihana* practice, fearing it would spread the plague fast (Miller 2017);

or storerooms. These are currently sites of highly sophisticated research and hypothetical findings. From the indigenous knowledge systems produced by these findings, there are forms of rebirth, renewal, re-creation and re-establishment of extinct artefacts, systems and values from the African past that inform and enrich modern sciences, knowledge gaps and questions confronting humanity today.

At a faith and religious level, it is the kind of preservation we read in the Gospels about the body of Jesus Christ being preserved by the woman with perfumed ointments (Mark 14:8). Jesus personally acknowledged this.¹⁸ We surmise that the excitement of meeting the resurrected Jesus evident in Mary Magdalene's intimate gestures (John 20:11-18)¹⁹ can only heighten Mary's value of embalming Jesus for this moment. At another juncture, the disciples' questioning of the resurrected Jesus with a possible restoration of political power suggests a strong link between "resurrection" and a "more than conqueror" power that can unseat even the might of the ruling Roman Empire.

In these cases, it is obvious that only those good persons and items important for life and sustenance are considered necessary for the continuation and, therefore, worthy of resurrection. Conversely, the Bible talks of the destruction of the evil and wicked in a lake of fire.²⁰ This suggests that the bad past and its corrupt agents should be denied a future with the resurrected good.

Traditionalists are still furious that missionaries either changed or destroyed many African value systems and even looted numerous artefacts which fill the museums abroad. To reverse these losses and to "resuscitate the old" several restorative programmes of inculturation²¹ are in place, even in African Theology and Black Theology. Many countries demand the return of the artefacts taken by the colonial empires and their subjects. Of significance is also the return of the remains of their dead, for example, the remains of the iconic Sara Baartman were returned to South Africa on 6 March 2002 at the request of President Nelson Mandela and buried on 9 August 2002 (South African History Online 2013). Other sciences have engaged Indigenous Knowledge Systems to achieve "rebirth" in this regard.

7.5 Dissonance between the old and the new

However, such a "resuscitation", as it were, is a complex matter and potentially contentious. This is because new forms of life and their specific conditions may

¹⁸ Mark 14:8: She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial;

¹⁹ In verse 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, ...";

²⁰ Rev. 21:8: But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death";

²¹ Enculturation applies to social sciences.

occasion conflict with the old ones. Hence, Jesus cautions, “No-one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old” (Luke 5:36). Such a warning should prove handy in constructively finding balance in the tension between the old and the new. For example, Womanist or Feminist theologies find many traditional lifestyles problematic because of patriarchy and its conservative, restrictive or oppressive modes of approach to women. There is no doubt that new concepts are also necessary to meet modern notions, challenges and prospects consistent with 21st Century models of life.

Hence, the resurrection body of Christ casts some light on our attempt to grasp this quantum age where the development of holograms as a fabrication of modern science to emulate the displacement of bodies can assist in the cure of viral infections and diseases. Whether this can be achieved in the real sense of “the resurrection of Christ” is another matter.

7.6 New life and a new era

Teachings about “resurrection” do not merely state the resurrection of the body but also project a new life and era that comes with it. We read in the book of Revelations that “there will be no more death or mourning, or cringe or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4). To this new order of the resurrected, the apostles of Jesus immediately associated a political dispensation that was free from domination and oppression of the Roman Empire.²² Hence, they asked the risen Christ, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The hope for a new political era for Israel has been there even before the Babylonian captivity. The imagery of the “resurrection of the army of skeletons” in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Ezek. 37:10)²³ can only inspire national hope over subjugation and domination by foreign powers. Jesus, as the “The King of the Jews” (note the same inscription on his cross as his charge), and the Messiah was expected to usher in this new era. There were definite expectations that accompanied this era, according to prophecy. In a nutshell, the messianic prophecy in Luke 4:18-19, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”, contained these “new life” ideals and continued to be a beacon of hope to Jews, and even Jesus’ followers.

Many Africans, both within the continent and in the Diaspora, are not only hoping but are also envisioning a new life and a new era within the notion of an African

²² The Romans had since conquered Palestine in 63BCE (Bright 1972).

²³ Ezek. 37:10, “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.”

Renaissance. This is possible. However, to achieve this, many accounts of resurrection point to a force outside human endeavours. While Abrahamic religions point to God, other religions are either silent or state the possibility as a phenomenon that may occur. If predominant doctrines of resurrection reside within the monotheistic religion of Yahweh or Allah only, then an African Renaissance that has no room for religion cannot hope to see a rebirth in the sense of new life and a new era. Indeed, these are the predominant religions of Africa and in their prayers for this highly sought-after “renewed life”, the default mode of resurrection lies embedded in God, and for the Christians, in the God who has already demonstrated this possibility in his Son, Jesus Christ. The African Renaissance discourse needs to listen to the Christian story of rebirth.

The Bible often talks of children as “seeds”. It is a language commonly used with reference to the plant kingdom where a “seed”, as an embodiment of new life at the death of a plant, comes very close to modelling the concept of “resurrection”. Hence, the Bible uses the term “seed” to a greater extent than the word “offspring”. As a metaphor, “seeds” point to the fact that when old life dies, meaning that when founders and forefathers of a faith community die, for example, Abraham, their children emerge as seeds to set forward not only the lineage, but also the covenant God has made with the principal partners of the covenant. Essential to this trajectory of linking principals to their seeds is the required consciousness of offspring to continually attach themselves to their forebearers through invocation, scribing and electronic recordings. For instance, when God addressed the Jewish nation, he constantly reminded them of the threesome with whom the covenant was transmitted, namely, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 50:24; Ex. 3:15; Acts 7:32) (Houdmann n.d.). The proteges of our renewal movements must continually be heralded and passed on to generations to come without end. This is the role of *izimbongi* (praise poets); to recite praises of the past heroes and heroines and link them to developments and their current successors (cf. Kaschula 1993, on the role of *imbongi* (Xhosa) and *izibongo* in African contexts).

8. “Rebirth” and being “born again” for Africa’s renewal

The concept “born again” is, in general use, a Christian construct originating from the gospel of John 3:3. It refers to “a spiritual and metaphorical rebirth, accepting Jesus as Messiah, and receiving the Holy Spirit” (Born Again 2009). This concept, over the years, gained popular use and could no longer be restricted to Christians. The reason for that is that self-described “born again” Christians are often enthusiastic, devoted and outspoken; hence, the phrase came to be used to describe any dedicated and enthusiastic supporter of a cause – e.g., born again politician, born again virgin, born again sceptic, etc. (cf. Utter and Tru 2004, Alexander, Brian

2008). This element underlines and defines an attribute of a fervent and committed participant.

However, some would view the concept of being “born again” to mean a movement of one from “death to rebirth”. For example, a person may experience “death” primarily within a social circle. Such a person may be said to have died to society or may be treated as dead – possibly as the result of a scandal or conviction of a crime. However, recovery from such a condition may again be perceived and experienced as being “born again” – possibly to be repeated (Judge 2004). Repeated acts of being born again may lead to what the author calls “thrice-born”. He cites as an example the “repeated” rebirth of Jimmy Swaggart (Giulians in Judge 2004), apparently because of recurrent confessions of sins.²⁴

Politicians are also known to experience some “rebirth” in their political career, especially after showing clear signs of failure (‘death’). Such could be said of Tony Blair, John Howard and especially George Bush after their initiatives in Iraq were conclusively in shambles. Their electoral successes have been referred to as being “born again” (Judge 2004). Besides, some politicians like Jimmy Carter, in his presidential campaign for the presidency of the USA, have in their campaigns referred to themselves as “born again” (Born Again 2009).

In fact, the subject of “rebirth” as a metaphor for “being born again” is so diverse that Judge (2004) recognises seven clusters with increasing experiential implications for the individual, namely:

- *Experiential rebirth* (operacy, flow, embodiment of mind, speaking with God, born again, possession, psychedelic experience, embodiment in song, spiritual rebirth);
- *Cognitive perspective* (metacognition, critical thinking, philosophy, aesthetic sensibility, orders of thinking, systematic, orders of abstraction, disciplines of action);
- *Therapeutical rebirth* (release from trauma, mentors, self-help, discipleship);
- *Developmental rebirth* (education, perspective, initiation, cultural creativity, individuation);
- *Psycho-behavioural rebirth* (sin-to-virtue, changing patterns of consumption, conversion);
- *Socio-religious rebirth* (birth right, destiny, reincarnation, social status, ceremony, ritual, group affiliation, games, sports);
- *Cultural rebirth* (renaissance, aesthetic birth, mytho-poiesis).

²⁴ In 1987 and following years, Evangelist Swaggart was accused for voyeuristic acts on prostitutes on a few occasions—with visual evidence on some—by his ministry competitors, leading to his public confessions and defrocking by his church, the Assemblies of God (Pike 2020).

These clusters serve, as it were, as umbrella names for even varied sub-topics under which much can be discussed. It, therefore, suffices to say, following the scheme mentioned above, that the subject of rebirth (and born again) has far-reaching roots. Clearly, the concept of being “born again” speaks more about humans than institutions. It speaks of a resolve by one to make a radical change and make good the failures of the past. When applying to political leaders, it is quite clear that many African leaders need to be born again, twice, thrice or more, for many have repeatedly reneged on their promises to their people.

When we place the question of being born again at the level of the African Renaissance movement, it is important to consider the movements with which the concept of being “born again” came to be closely associated. The claim of “ownership” of this concept is said to lie with the group of so-called “Jesus People” with whom the Christian counterculture impressed on the “intense conversion experience” and a clear identity of “devout believers” (Born Again 2009). This formed part of the growing Evangelical Protestant renewal (Born Again 2009), which today is the fastest growing, profoundly impacting societies worldwide. Nowadays, the hallmark of being “born again” rests with the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement (Charismatic Christianity 2010). Such phenomenal growth and influence are what the African Renaissance needed; because then all areas of social, cultural, economic and political structures could not stay unaffected. However, more than anything, it is the spirit behind the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement that the African Renaissance desperately needs. This spirit is none other than the Holy Spirit.

9. Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs, it is evident that hope in a reborn South Africa requires reimagining the concepts that have always been with us but are either spiritualised or trivialised through unbelief or scepticism. It requires an institutionalised movement that is anchored in faith. Faith is “confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1 NIV). Faith is a critical element of salvation, in other words, liberation.

Therefore, Africa's quest for “salvation” cannot be better expressed than in the words of a popular traditional chorus, “The Holy Spirit [will] come down and Africa will be saved”. African Renaissance cannot hope for any renewal and reconstruction if the life-giving Spirit of God is not allowed to blow through the dry patches and the fallen walls of the great past civilisations, the skeletal heroes and heroines of African people,²⁵ the scattered refugees, the hungry orphans and widows, but also through the self-impostors, dictators and corrupt officials through the length

²⁵ I hereby invoke the example of prophet Ezekiel's “resurrection” of the “dry bones” (Ezek. 37:1-14).

and breadth of the continent of Africa. It is through well-funded institutions of the renaissance that rebirth can the sun of our new dawn wade off the negating clouds of corruption, despotism and apathy that hold the new life hostage and suffocate it into perpetual still-borns of hope and sprawling graves of the midwives of caring democracies and engineers of unique and functional technologies.

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