THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

A.M.E.C.E.A

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF MORAL THEOLOGY

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE GOLDEN RULE: A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF MORAL RELATIVISM AMONG THE YOUTH IN KILIFI DEANERY - CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MOMBASA, KENYA

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JULY, 2025

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, solemnly declare that this doctoral dissertation is entirely my original work. It has been accomplished through personal reading, pastoral experience, scientific research, and critical reflection in moral theology. This study is submitted to the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate in Sacred Theology, with a specialization in Moral Theology.

I affirm that this dissertation has not been presented to any other university or institution for academic credit. All information drawn from external sources has been duly and honestly acknowledged throughout the work.

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DEDICATION

To God, the source of all wisdom, truth, and love. This work is humbly offered in gratitude for the divine inspiration and enduring grace that sustained its vision, development, and completion. May it serve as a reflection of faith seeking understanding, and as a contribution toward guiding young hearts toward moral clarity and spiritual integrity. Glory to God Alone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to Almighty God, the source of life, wisdom, and strength, for His abiding grace throughout this academic journey. His divine guidance has sustained me in moments of uncertainty and inspired me with clarity and purpose in the pursuit of this research. With reverent thanksgiving, I dedicate this work to Him, whose truth illumines every honest quest for knowledge and understanding.

I am sincerely grateful to Mother General Sr. Jane Irene Awuor and her Council for their generous support and for enabling me to see the completion of this study. My heartfelt thanks also go to the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Mombasa. I am moved by your constant encouragement. Your unwavering support has carried me through, and this achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

I extend heartfelt gratitude to my sponsors: Next Generation Leadership Programme (NGLP) and Hilton-Hekima Sisters Scholars Programme (HHSSP), for their generous support of my postgraduate studies at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. I also sincerely thank Rev. Professor Emmanuel Wabanhu my fist supervisor and Rev. Dr. Samuel Bedijo OSB, second supervisor, whose scholarly dedication, insightful critique, and patient guidance have shaped the depth, precision, and integrity of this work. Their commitment and pastoral mentorship remains an enduring source of inspiration.

This research has also been enriched by the goodwill of many contributors whose names may not appear individually yet whose impact is sincerely felt. Special appreciation goes to Sr. Gladys Kirimi Ndege for her steadfast support through HHSSP. To all the respondents who graciously participated in questionnaires and interviews, I am truly grateful. Thank you.

To dear friends and colleagues whose prayers, counsel, and moral support have been a source of comfort and resolve, I offer my sincere thanks. Your companionship has reminded me that learning and service are never solitary endeavors.

With heartfelt gratitude, I honor my family for their steadfast love and support. To my late father, Mr. Lucas Maluki (RIP), and my mother, Mrs. Theresia Syuwia, thank you for your enduring prayers and guidance. I also thank my siblings, nephews, and nieces for their encouragement. This achievement is a reflection of your unwavering presence and faith in me.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the growing impact of moral relativism among youth in Kilifi Deanery, Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya. As socio-cultural shifts, digital influence, and globalization reshape communal life, traditional moral values rooted in solidarity and kinship are increasingly eroded. The loss of objective moral standards has led to ethical uncertainty, weakening youth identity and spiritual grounding. Grounded in moral theology, the study examines how relativism affects young people's decision-making and behavior. It draws on field data, theological reflection, and cultural analysis to assess this moral transformation. In response, the Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"* (Mt. 7:12), is proposed as a universal ethical framework. This principle, rooted in Catholic teaching and African communal ethics, fosters empathy, accountability, and moral clarity. The study shows its practical relevance amid ethical confusion. Pastoral strategies are offered to promote moral formation and restore communal bonds. Ultimately, the research seeks to strengthen youth moral resilience in a rapidly changing society.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*
AD	Anno Domino
AgriBiz	Agriculture Business
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AMECEA	Association of Membership Episcopal Conference in Eastern Africa
BC	Before Christ
C.S.Sp	Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans or Holy Ghost Fathers)
CBHC	Community-Based Health Care
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CE	Common Era
Cf	Confer
CHDK	Catholic Health Department of Kenya
CMA	Catholic Men Association
CUEA	Catholic University of Eastern Africa
CWA	Catholic Women Association
DC	District of Columbia
Ed(s)	Editors
EUDIDA	European Union and Danish International Development Agency
Ex.	Exodus
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
Gen Z	Generation Z (people born roughly between 1997 and 2012)
Gen.	Genesis
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
Jn.	John

KCCB	Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops
KCYEEP	Kilifi County Youth Economic Empowerment Program
KEFRI	Kenya Forestry Research Institute
KEMFSED	Kenya Marine and Fisheries Socio-Economic Development
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
KLRC	Kenya Law Reform Commission
KNAYS	Kenya National Adolescents and Youth Survey
KRA	Commission on Revenue Allocation
KYEEP	Kenya Youth Economic Empowerment Program
Mat.	Mathew
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council
NACADA	National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse
NCPD	National Council for Population and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHIF	National Health Insurance Fund
oC	Degree Celsius
Pr.	Proverbs
RIP	Rest in Peace
SCCs	Small Christian Communities
SLYEI	Sisters Led Youth Empowerment Initiative
SMS	Short Message Service
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Background of the Study

Today's youth navigate a complex moral landscape shaped by globalization, digital influence, and rapidly evolving cultural norms. In this shifting context, moral relativism has emerged as a critical challenge. This dissertation: ***The Principle of the Golden Rule: A Response to the Challenges of Moral Relativism among the Youth in Kilifi Deanery – Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya,*** seeks to explore this phenomenon through ethical, theological, and socio-cultural lenses. Francis Fukuyama cautions that "Relativism, the doctrine that all values are merely relative… fires indiscriminately, shooting out the legs of not only the 'absolutisms', dogmas, and certainties … of the Western tradition, but that tradition's emphasis on tolerance, diversity, and freedom of thought as well."[1] His concern highlights how relativism weakens the very values it claims to defend. Without firm moral foundations, principles such as justice, human dignity, and tolerance become unstable.

The idea that morality is entirely subjective leads to ethical uncertainty. Individuals particularly the youth, struggle to make sound judgments or oppose harmful behaviour. Jonathan Sacks asserts, "If nothing can be true absolutely, if all values are culturally determined, then cherished principles like human equality have to go by the wayside as well."[2] In this climate, youth often struggle to define right and wrong, leading to moral confusion. In such a background, moral values become subjective and unpredictable. This shift undermines the capacity to defend universal values and threatens the pursuit of a just and compassionate society. This study operates within the framework of moral theology, focusing on the ethical implications of relativism among youth in Kilifi Deanery. The Deanery as Samuel Bedijo observes, "is going through fast and overwhelming social-cultural changes, which are shaking the very foundations of embedded traditional moral values."[3] Bedijo's observation reflects a deep concern about how

[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), 332.
[2] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in a Divided Time* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2020), 199.
[3] Samuel Bedijo, *The Moral Problem Posed by Individualism in the Church in Africa: A Case Study in Nebbi Catholic Diocese in North-Western Uganda* (EOS Verlag Sankt Ottilien, 2013), 22.

rapid change is unsettling long-held moral foundations and cultural norms in Kilifi County.[4] The Midzi-Chenda community, like many others, once upheld values such as initiation rites.

Traditionally, initiation rite marked the transition from childhood to adulthood, instilling discipline, communal responsibility, and defined gender roles. This is viewed today as outdated. Customs surrounding marriage, kinship, and spiritual leadership are losing ground to modern alternatives that often sideline communal responsibility and ancestral wisdom. Early marriages and teenage pregnancies are becoming more prevalent. As youth redefine their identities through new cultural lenses, the delicate balance between progress and heritage continues to shift, reshaping the moral landscape of Kilifi Deanery. Midzi-Chenda people emphasized strong kinship ties, individuals were accountable to extended family and community emphasizing on solidarity. Youth increasingly embrace individualism, making choices without consultation of their parents or elders or concern for the community. As Richard Rwiza writes "With urbanization the traditional concept of solidarity is giving way to individualism, values of secularism and personal privacy."[5]This transformation weakens communal bonds and erodes traditional African ethics rooted in solidarity and shared responsibility.

These shifts call for deeper inquiry into the roots of moral relativism among the youth. The research explores how the loss of objective moral standards affects relationships and spiritual identity. By grounding the response in the Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"* (Mt. 7:12), the study aims to offer a moral compass grounded in Catholic teaching. This principle provides an ethical anchor capable of restoring clarity, accountability, and compassion in a society facing rapid change. Although existing studies address moral relativism in Kilifi County, they overlook its specific manifestation among youth in Kilifi Deanery. This research fills that gap, investigating the presence and impact of moral relativism within the Deanery and offering a faith-based response to its challenges.

[4] These two terms: Kilifi Deanery and Kilifi County will both be used throughout this study interchangeably due to their connectedness.
[5] Richard N. Rwiza, *Formation of Christian Conscience in Modern Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 28-31.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates whether Midzi-Chenda traditional moral values, together with Christian moral virtues and the Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"* (Mt. 7:12), can serve as an effective response to the growing challenge of moral relativism and promote objective moral truth among youth in Kilifi Deanery.

Rationale

The motivation behind this study stems from pastoral experiences in Kilifi Deanery, where recurring concerns emerged about youth morality being shaped by personal preferences, foreign cultural influences, and lack of accountability. Observations from parish programs, school visits, family encounters, and Small Christian Communities revealed rising trends in individualism, indiscipline, and moral confusion. Issues like youth radicalization, teen pregnancies, political division, and disengagement from faith and family, prompted the need to address the ethical challenges posed by moral relativism among the youth.

Central Question

How can the principle of Golden rule be a response to the challenges of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi deanery - Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya?

Working Hypothesis

Maybe the Midzi-Chenda traditional moral values together with principle of Golden rule and Christian moral virtues could be a reliable model to mitigate relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical. It integrates both social-anthropological and moral-theological approaches to examine the lived experiences, cultural influences, and ethical shifts among youth in Kilifi Deanery. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, it seeks to describe current moral patterns, interpret the impact of relativism, and evaluate responses grounded in Catholic moral teaching and traditional Midzi-Chenda values.

This study's fieldwork was conducted over two months, January and February 2024, within Kilifi Deanery, focusing particularly on Kikambala Parish. Data collection methods included questionnaires and oral interviews aimed at capturing firsthand perspectives on youth morality and the prevalence of moral relativism. Out of 145 distributed questionnaires, 102 were filled and returned, while 43 remained unreturned. Field activities were coordinated with the guidance of the parish priest and facilitated by appointed field assistants who ensured access to the relevant groups.

Participants included youth, members of the Catholic Men Association (CMA), Catholic Women Association (CWA), Small Christian Communities (SCCs), school staff, priests, religious men and women, catechists, Christian families, and the diocesan pastoral coordinator. Additionally, civil servants such as primary school teachers, students, and pupils were engaged. The study also visited two street rescue centers, where interviews were conducted with both the staff and the rescued youth. These diverse perspectives provided a rich, contextual understanding of the moral challenges facing young people in Kilifi Deanery.

The moral-theological approach employed in this study draws from a rich and diverse foundation of ethical inquiry. It integrates classical philosophical critiques, Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, and insights from medieval theologians. The study also engages magisterial teachings and contemporary theological reflections. Contributions from African moral theologians have helped contextualize Christian ethics within communal and culturally grounded values. This interdisciplinary method enriches the study by providing both doctrinal depth and cultural relevance. Moreover, this inquiry has translated theory into praxis by proposing a practical basis to address moral relativism, grounded in participatory moral-theological recommendations for implementation.

Structure of the Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters, each framed by an introduction and conclusion. Chapter One offers an *Overview of Kilifi Deanery* within the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, covering its historical background, geographic boundaries, and demographic composition. It examines the region's political structure and religious profile, supported by Archdiocesan data and key economic activities. Furthermore, it analyzes the socio-cultural framework of the Midzi-Chenda community emphasizing traditional gender roles, kinship

patterns, and cultural values as a lens through which the moral challenges confronting youth in Kilifi are understood.

Chapter Two is significant to the works. It examines the *Challenges of Moral Relativism among the Youth in Kilifi Deanery*, where the conceptual foundations and ethical tensions inherent in moral relativism are discussed. The analysis highlights key contributing factors such as globalization, emerging religious movements, evolving leadership dynamics, and shifting parental influence. The chapter concludes by evaluating the impact of these forces on communal values, particularly the rise of individualism, materialism, and corruption.

Chapter Three focusses on *A Critical Ethical Analysis of Moral Relativism*, tracing its philosophical and historical foundations. Here the doctrinal implications, and its major forms are analyzed, evaluating its impact on moral life of the youth. The chapter evaluates its influence on the moral life of the youth, examines the components of moral acts, and applies key ethical theories to assess moral reasoning within relativist frameworks.

Chapter Four presents the *Moral Theological Considerations on Moral Relativism*, beginning with classical philosophical critiques that expose its logical inconsistencies. It affirms the moral order grounded in Sacred Scripture and explores patristic and medieval contributions that root ethics in divine and natural law. Magisterial teachings present a firm doctrinal refutation, while African moral theologians offer culturally grounded insights that uphold communal ethics and challenge relativist trends in the African context.

Chapter Five discusses the *Moral Relevance of the Golden Rule in Curbing Relativism among Youth in Kilifi Deanery.* Here it explores the Golden Rule as a universal counter principle to moral relativism, grounded in historical and philosophical thought. It examines its practical application through families, the Church, and local institutions, concluding with theological and pastoral recommendations to strengthen moral absolutism and foster ethical coherence among youth.

Scope and Delimitations

This study has a number of challenges. First, this study is grounded in moral theology, focusing on moral relativism from theological and ethical perspectives. Second, it centers on Kilifi Deanery rather than the broader Archdiocese of Mombasa to ensure a localized and

focused analysis. Third, it responds to a lack of published research on moral relativism among youth in this deanery, aiming to fill that gap. Fourth, due to the study's limited scope, it does not offer a comprehensive account of relativism across the entire archdiocese. Fifth, given the complexity of the topic, this work addresses only the aspects most relevant to the theological and pastoral concerns of Kilifi Deanery.

Relevance of the Study

This study seeks a moral response to the growing challenge of moral relativism among youth in Kilifi Deanery. Through the lens of moral theology, it explores the erosion of objective moral standards and its impact on ethical decision-making and spiritual identity. The study proposes the Golden Rule, grounded in Catholic tradition, as a universal moral principle capable of restoring clarity, accountability, and compassion. By integrating pastoral, theological, and socio-cultural perspectives, it provides practical insights for Church leaders, educators, and families who play a vital role in shaping the moral lives of young people within a rapidly changing environment.

Though localized, this inquiry carries relevance beyond Kilifi Deanery and may resonate with similar moral concerns across Kenya and beyond. The absence of published research on moral relativism among youth in this region underscores the study’s contribution to academic discourse. It also invites further exploration of how the Church can mobilize its pastoral resources more effectively, responding to moral challenges through a faith-guided framework. Moreover, the study hopes to inspire deeper ecclesial reflection on the organization of Christian community life. This reflection is rooted in shared values of faith, love, and hope, as the Church seeks to navigate the ethical complexities of contemporary society.

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF KILIFI DEANERY

Introduction

This chapter presents a structured overview of Kilifi Deanery within the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya, beginning with its historical development and geographical boundaries. It examines the demographic profile and socio-political organization of the region, emphasizing how these aspects shape community life. Catholic religious beliefs are highlighted as central to the spiritual identity of the population, supported by Archdiocesan statistics that reflect the Church's pastoral presence. Economic activities especially agriculture, fishing, and tourism are outlined as vital to local livelihoods. The chapter also considers the role of education and healthcare institutions in driving social development. Finally, it explores the cultural context of the Midzi-Chenda people, focusing on traditional gender roles, kinship structures, and core values, which together form a setting for understanding the moral challenges facing the youth in Kilifi today.

1.1 Brief Historical Background of Kilifi Deanery

Understanding the history of Kilifi Deanery requires contextualizing it within the broader trajectory of the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa. The Archdiocese's origins date back to 1889 with the establishment of Mombasa's first Catholic mission. According to Fr. Harrison Yaa, Pastoral Coordinator of the Archdiocese: "archival records maintained at the secretariat indicate that Fr. Alexander Le Roy, a Holy Ghost Missionary (C.S.Sp.), is widely recognized as the pioneer of this initiative. His contributions were instrumental in shaping the mission's trajectory, laying the foundational framework for its subsequent expansion and the sustained pastoral engagement."[6] The Spiritans initiated their missionary work by founding a chapel and residence in *Ndia Kuu* (Old Town).[7] This area, known for its Arab-influenced architecture, holds strategic historical significance. Among its notable landmarks is Fort Jesus, a Portuguese fortification

[6] Harrison Yaa, interview by researcher, at Mombasa, 26/02/2024.

[7] *Ndia Kuu*, derived from the Swahili term *Njia Kuu*, meaning "the Main Street," holds significant historical importance in Mombasa. It has long connected Fort Jesus, a fortress built by the Portuguese in 1593 to the interior parts of Old Town. Historically, *Ndia Kuu* served as a strategic trade route, facilitating commerce and governance under successive rulers, including the Mazrui, Al-Busaidi, Portuguese, and British.

constructed in 1593. These heritage sites remain central to understanding the Catholic presence in coastal Kenya.

A pastoral agent at Holy Ghost Cathedral reflects: "as one of the earliest points of European contact in East Africa, Mombasa became a strategic center for missionary activity, shaping the spread of Christianity in the region. The Portuguese, who built Fort Jesus in 1593, were the first to introduce Catholicism in Mombasa."[8] Despite early Catholic contact, sustained evangelization began in the 19th century under the Holy Ghost Missionaries. Their work persisted through political instability and religious diversity, leading to the establishment of churches, schools, and Kenya's first Catholic hospital founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny. In 1955, Mombasa was elevated to diocesan status. Bishop Eugene Butler, C.S.Sp., was appointed the first bishop of Mombasa and Zanzibar. His successors included Bishop Nicodemus Kirima, the first indigenous bishop (1987)[9], followed by Bishop John Njenga (1988–2005), who stressed continuity: "It is important for all in our Archdiocese to get a better understanding of what we have inherited and encourage them to pass it on faithfully to future generations."[10] Archbishop Boniface Lele succeeded him in 2005, followed by Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonda in 2014, under whom the Archdiocese expanded its outreach.

Kilifi Deanery was formed as one of ten deaneries within the Archdiocese, responding to the pastoral needs of the growing Christian population in Kenya's coastal region. According to Canon Law: "To foster pastoral care by means of common action, several neighbouring parishes can be joined together in special groupings, such as deaneries."[11] The deanery facilitates pastoral collaboration and administration across parishes such as Kilifi, Chonyi, Kikambala, Mtwapa, Mtomondoni, and Matanomane. Over time, Kilifi Deanery has experienced notable growth in parish structures and pastoral programs. The increased engagement of local clergy and lay leaders has deepened cultural integration and enhanced the relevance of Catholic teachings. Today, the deanery oversees key faith-based institutions in education, healthcare, and social

[8] Pastoral agent, interviewed by the researcher, at Holy Ghost Cathedral, 26/02/2024.
[9] David M. Cheney, "Archdiocese of Mombasa," retrieved fromhttps://catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmomb.html (accessed 09/04/2024).
[10] John Njenga was Roman Catholic Archbishop of Mombasa Diocese from 1988 to 2005.
[11] *Code of Canon Law* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), no. 374. Deaneries are typically formed as administrative subdivisions to facilitate pastoral work and governance, often emerging as the Church expands its structure to accommodate growing parishes. Each deanery is led by a Dean appointed by the bishop to act in his name.

welfare, positioning itself as a vital agent of holistic development. Its historical evolution offers essential context for examining contemporary moral concerns, especially among the youth. As they confront tensions between tradition and modernity, the Catholic Church through the structures of Kilifi Deanery provide holistic formation.

1.2 The Geographical Location

Kilifi Deanery is located within Kilifi County, part of the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya.[12] The deanery comprises both urban and rural parishes that deliver religious services and pastoral care. According to *Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI*), Kilifi County lies between latitudes 3°33′ and 3°56′ south of the Equator and longitudes 39°38′ and 40°10′ east of the Prime Meridian. Its coastal tropical climate features high temperatures, seasonal monsoon winds, and elevated humidity.[13] Bordering Chonyi Deanery to the west, Malindi to the north, Mombasa to the south, and Kwale to the southwest, Kilifi Deanery integrates into a coordinated pastoral network across the coastal region. The Mombasa–Malindi Highway and Kilifi Bridge enhance regional mobility, facilitating access to parishes, mission centers, and ecclesial institutions. The annual temperature ranges between 21 oC and 30oC in the coastal belt and between 30oC and 34oC in the hinterland.

According to KEFRI, Kilifi County has four major topographical features. First, Coastal Plain: A low-lying strip along the ocean, rich in mangroves and coral soils, supporting farming and fishing. Second, Foot Plateau: Slightly elevated and gently sloping, this zone contains dry riverbeds and links the inland to the coast. Third, Coastal Range: A series of sandstone hills rising to about 450 meters, offering scenic elevation and unique biodiversity. Fourth, Nyika Plateau: The largest and most arid zone, characterized by sparse vegetation and used primarily for livestock and hardy crops.[14] Mango forms part of the landscape and they have been in existence for many decades. Most farmers here grow the four tree crops as a basis for subsistence of which the highest income return comes from cocoa nut, citruses, cashew nut and mangoes due to their flowering and fruiting pattern.

[12] These two terms: Kilifi deanery and Kilifi County will both be used throughout this study interchangeably due to their connectedness. Kilifi County has seven sub-Counties, namely, Kilifi North, Kilifi South, Ganze, Malindi, Magarini, Rabai and Kaloleni. For the accuracy of this work, this study will be limited only to Kilifi South.

[13] Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), "Kilifi," retrieved from www.kefri.org/MANGO/pdf/Kilifi (accessed 01/05/2025).

[14] Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), "Kilifi," retrieved from www.kefri.org/MANGO/pdf/Kilifi (accessed 01/05/2025).

According to Harrison Yaa's Annual Report on Ecclesiastical Services and Community Engagement of the Archdiocese, "the physical geography of Kilifi Deanery plays a crucial role in accessibility to religious services. Parishes are strategically spread across urban centers and rural communities, ensuring effective pastoral care for the Catholic faithful."[15] This observation underscores how the region's spatial distribution and infrastructure directly facilitate equitable access to religious institutions, enhancing the Archdiocese's outreach and spiritual support across diverse communities. Topographically, the deanery includes coastal plains, mangrove forests, and Kilifi Creek features that shape ecological diversity and influence settlement, infrastructure, and outreach.

1.3 Demographics Composition

Kilifi County is characterized by a rich and diverse demographic composition shaped by historical migration, trade, and cultural interconnections. The dominant tribe on the South Coast is the Digo, while north of Mombasa Island is the Giriama and are the most populous. The other seven sub-tribes are the Chonyi, Duruma, Jibana, Kambe, Kauma, Rabai and Ribe. These tribes maintain deep historical ties to the region.[16] These communities have traditionally upheld strong cultural and social structures, notably through the establishment of fortified settlements known as kayas, which served as centers for governance and spiritual practices. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics states that Mijikenda community forms approximately 80% of the population, with subgroups such as the Giriama, Chonyi, and Kauma maintaining deep historical ties to the region. The Swahili and Arab communities, traditionally associated with coastal trade and Islamic heritage, constitute about 10%, contributing significantly to the area's economic and cultural framework. European settlers and Indian communities, primarily engaged in business and tourism, make up around 5%,[17] further enriching Kilifi's multicultural identity.

The presence of diverse ethnic groups has facilitated interfaith dialogue and social integration, where institutions like the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa play a central role in fostering cohesion and cultural understanding. A study by Sue Feary emphasizes the intrinsic

[15] Harrison Yaa, SMS message to the researcher, at Mombasa, July 10, 2025.
[16] Dianiregatta, "Background," retrieved from https://dianiregatta.co.ke/background/ (accessed03/05/2025); Cf. Cynthia Salvadori, *We Came in Chains: The Story of the Mijikenda Peoples of Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenya Museum Society, 1989), 23.
[17] Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2022* (Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2025).

link between human existence and cultural heritage, asserting that "without humans, there can be no culture and therefore no cultural heritage."[18] This demographic diversity highlights the necessity of inclusive pastoral strategies, ensuring that historical, economic, and cultural dimensions are acknowledged in the continued development of Kilifi Deanery.

1.4 Political Organization

The Mijikenda people have a decentralized political system structured around clans, where governance is overseen by a council of elders (Kambi) responsible for dispute resolution and administration. John Kazungu explains, "The age-set system (riika) plays a crucial role, as young men form groups after circumcision, providing warriors for defense. Within this system, older men hold authority over younger men, while women exert influence through spirit possession and alliances with elders."[19] Each Mijikenda clan occupies a designated area within the kaya, fulfilling specialized roles that contribute to governance, social organization, and economic stability. While sub-clans, though not political entities, play a significant role in organizing major social events such as weddings and funerals, the local lineage, consisting of residential groups, collectively cultivates land under the leadership of the homestead head. Gladys Mokeira Obiero explains:

The Mijikenda clans traditionally had specialized roles within their communities. The Rabai clan is known for its strong leadership and administrative roles, often overseeing dispute resolution and communal decision-making. The Kauma clan is recognized for its deep spiritual traditional leadership, including rituals, prayers, and maintaining sacred sites within the kaya forests. Giriama and Duruma clans historically provided warriors for protection, ensuring the security of their communities, while the Digo and Chonyi clans are known for their expertise in farming, particularly in cultivating crops such as coconut, mangoes, and traditional vegetables.[20]

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[18] Sue Feary, "Earth's Cultural Heritage," in *Protected Area Governance and Management*, ed. Graeme L. Worboys (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015): 81–116.
[19] John Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 29/02/2024.
[20] Gladys Mokeira Obiero, "All Mijikenda sub-tribes, languages, tradition, and home," retrieved from https://www.tuko.co.ke/facts-lifehacks/guides/543844-all-mijikenda-sub-tribes-languages-tradition-home-counties/ (accessed 05/05/2025).

These roles have been essential in preserving the political, social, and economic balance of Mijikenda society, fostering unity and continuity across generations. Ritual practices, ancestral reverence, and sacred site preservation remain deeply rooted in their traditions, ensuring cultural heritage is upheld. Governance, led by councils of elders (Kambi), continues to play a crucial role in dispute resolution and decision-making, though modern institutions now complement traditional leadership structures. Protection roles have adapted to contemporary security needs, with communities implementing localized protection measures. Agricultural practices, historically reliant on indigenous techniques, now incorporate modern farming methods while preserving staple crops like coconut and mangoes. Urbanization and education have reshaped youth engagement with their heritage, blending ancestral customs with modern socio-economic demands. Despite these transformations, the core roles of governance, spiritual leadership, defense, and agriculture remain pillars of Mijikenda identity, ensuring the continuity of their traditions in an evolving society.

1.5 Religious Beliefs

The religious beliefs of the Midzi-Chenda people are deeply rooted in their reverence for *Mulungu*, a supreme deity, alongside the veneration of ancestral spirits. While *Mulungu* is seen as the creator and sustainer of life, direct worship is rare, as spiritual devotion primarily revolves around ancestral spirits who act as intermediaries between the divine and the living. John Mbiti highlights this deep religiosity in African societies, asserting that "Africans are notoriously religious,"[21] emphasizing their long-established spiritual traditions even before missionary influence. However, scholars such as Eric O. Ayisi critique early missionary efforts, noting:

> Though the missionaries had a strong and zealous ambition to bring the good news to the natives they lost sight of the fact that the natives were not devoid of religious experience. Africans on the whole are more religious than the Athenians. The missionaries treated the natives as tabula rasa in terms of religious awareness; they misunderstood their cosmological beliefs, and condemned the religious institutions which were the symbolic and psychological expression of their social structure and milieu.[22]

[21] John Mbiti, *An Introduction to African Religion*, 27.
[22] Eric o. Ayis, *An Intronduction to the Study of African Culture, Second Edition* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 107-108.

Central to Midzi-Chenda religious practice are the Kaya forests, which serve as sacred spaces for worship, ancestral veneration, and communal rituals. These forests are considered ancestral homes, preserving spiritual heritage and ecological balance. Within the Kaya, the council of elders (Kambi) plays a critical role in maintaining these traditions, overseeing ceremonies such as initiations, oath-taking, and reconciliations. In addition, *waganga* (traditional healers) hold a significant place in Midzi-Chenda spiritual life, using herbal medicine and ritual-based healing to restore harmony. Their knowledge blends medicinal expertise with spiritual guidance, reinforcing the interconnectedness of health and religious belief.

The National Museum of Kenya recognizes the importance of Kaya forests, describing them as "sites where sacred graves and religious practices continue to thrive, maintaining cultural identity."[23] Despite the growing influence of modernization and external religions, Midzi-Chenda spiritual traditions persist, adapting to new contexts while preserving their foundational principles. Many indigenous practices now coexist with contemporary faiths, creating a unique syncretic spiritual framework that integrates ancestral customs with modern influences. This continuity ensures that sacred traditions are not lost but instead evolve alongside societal changes. Through their unwavering connection to ancestors, nature, and spirituality, the Midzi-Chenda people uphold a religious system that fosters communal harmony and strengthens their historical legacy.

1.6 Archdiocesan Statistics

The Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa plays a pivotal role in shaping the religious and social landscape of Kenya's coastal region. As a key institution in Christian evangelization and community development, it operates across multiple deaneries, including Kilifi Deanery, providing spiritual guidance, education, and healthcare services. According to statistics provided by city population, "the population of Kilifi County is projected at 1,577,335, with Christians making up approximately 55% of the Coastal population."[24] This highlights the importance of the Catholic faithful in the area. Within this broader context, the Catholic population is estimated at 675,000, while the remaining inhabitants adhere to Islam, Hinduism, and African Traditional

[23] The National Museum of Kenya, "Sacred Mijikenda Kaya Forests," retrieved from https://museums.or.ke/sacred-mijikenda-kaya-forests/ (accessed 17/05/2025).
[24] City Population, "Kilifi (County, Kenya) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location," retrieved from https://www.citypopulation.de/en/kenya/admin/coast/03__kilifi (accessed 09/04/2024).

Faiths, demonstrating the region's diverse religious composition.[25] Despite the challenges posed by Islamic influence and cultural variations, Christianity continues to flourish, contributing to social cohesion and moral development.

According to the January 2025 report by Father Harrison Yaa, the Pastoral Coordinator of the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, "the Archdiocese is served by 78 priests, comprising 43 diocesan and 25 religious clergy members, ensuring the effective administration of pastoral care and sacramental responsibilities across the region. Structurally, the archdiocese is well-organized into 12 deaneries, 56 parishes, and 1,402 Small Christian Communities (SCCs),[26] reflecting a strong framework for grassroots evangelization and social engagement. This structure enables the Catholic Church to reach communities at different levels, fostering spiritual growth, faith-based education, and humanitarian services, thereby reinforcing its mission of evangelization and community development in the coastal region. Within this framework, Kilifi Deanery alone accounts for 15,813 Catholic faithful, making it a vital component of the Archdiocese's outreach. The presence of a structured religious system enables coordinated efforts in spiritual formation, social justice initiatives, and humanitarian aid, including healthcare services.

1.7 Economic Activities

Kilifi County, situated along Kenya's coastline, boasts a dynamic economic landscape shaped by its geographical attributes, demographic composition, and strategic development policies. The region's economy is anchored in agriculture, tourism, fishing, trade, and emerging industrial sectors, each playing a pivotal role in fostering growth, sustainability, and socio-economic advancement. These economic activities not only enhance the county's economic resilience but also provide substantial benefits, particularly for the youth, by generating employment opportunities, promoting entrepreneurship, and facilitating skill development as discussed below:

1.8 Agriculture

Agriculture forms the backbone of Kilifi County's economy. Key crops include coconuts, cashew nuts, mangoes, maize, and a range of horticultural produce. Maize and cassava are grown mainly for subsistence, while coconuts, cashew nuts, sisal, and citrus fruits such as mangoes and

[25] Secretariat, *Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa Strategic Plan* 2018-2027.
[26] Harrison Yaa, Pastoral Report of the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa, 27/01/ 2025.

pineapples, serve as cash crops. Livestock farming, especially dairy and poultry, also supports food security and income generation. The *Commission on Revenue Allocation (KRA)* notes "The fertile land supports the cultivation of coconuts, cashew nuts, mangoes, and maize, while livestock farming and dairy production contribute significantly to local livelihoods.[27] However, land ownership remains a challenge. Although over half the land is arable, only 31% of farmers have title deeds. This hinders access to financing and long-term investments. Youth involvement in agriculture is growing. John Kamau states:

> Programs such as the AgriBiz initiative, supported by the European Union and Danish International Development Agency, have been instrumental in providing financing and capacity-building assistance to youth-led agribusiness enterprises.[28]

The Kenya Youth Economic Empowerment Program (KYEEP) has enhanced young farmers' skills, supporting ventures in poultry and horticulture. According to John Muya, "Five poultry groups and three groups practicing riverine agriculture (watermelon) … currently have promising group income-generating activities."[29] These groups show potential in agribusiness. The Catholic Church plays a vital role in agricultural and community development. Youth engagement is a key focus, with initiatives promoting environmental sustainability and economic empowerment. *The Sisters Led Youth Empowerment Initiative (AOSK-SLYI),* run by the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya, offers mentorship, life skills, and training to address challenges such as teenage pregnancies. It promotes sustainable livelihoods and youth participation. Similarly, inspired by Pope Francis' *Laudato Si', SLYI* mobilizes youth for climate action. This effort reflect Pope Francis' call that, "… Our "dominion" over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship."[30] Catholic youth groups participate in tree planting and mangrove restoration to revive coastal ecosystems.

Catholic-supported programs like the *Kilifi County Youth Economic Empowerment Program* (KCYEEP) has created job opportunities for the young people. They offer vocational training, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Religious leaders continue to

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[27] Commission on Revenue Allocation, *Kilifi County Fact Sheet*, 3rd ed. (Nairobi: CRA, 2023), 1.
[28] John Kamau, "Kilifi women and youth to benefit from Agribiz program," retrieved from https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2021-03-11-kilifi-women-and-youth-to-benefit-from-agribiz-programme (accessed 05/05.2025).
[29] Francis Muya, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kadzego, 29/02/2024.
[30] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si',* On Care for the Common Home (24 May 2025), no. 116; Cf. Desire Youth Initiative (DYI), "Redefining Equality, Nurturing Growth," retrieved from https://desireyouth.org/ (accessed 05/05/2025).

advocate for government support in crop value addition, including cashew nuts, coconuts, mangoes, and pineapples. Their efforts affirm the Church's commitment to agricultural sustainability and youth empowerment. These initiatives help address moral relativism and foster ethical leadership among the youth of Kilifi Deanery.

1.8.1 Fisheries

Fisheries are central to Kilifi County's economy, supporting food security, employment, and biodiversity. Coastal and estuarine ecosystems, such as Kilifi Creek, provide essential breeding and feeding grounds for key fish species. These habitats sustain both artisanal and commercial fishing, anchoring local livelihoods and driving economic growth. Dorcus Sigana, Kenneth Mavuti, and Richard Ruwa write:

> Fishery organisms are vital for local communities, offering food security and employment opportunities. However, they highlight persistent challenges such as habitat degradation, overfishing, and unsustainable fishing practices, which threaten the long-term viability of the sector. Their research emphasizes the urgency of sustainable fisheries management, advocating for conservation strategies and responsible fishing practices to safeguard economic and environmental stability.[31]

Jumuiya Ya Kaunti Za Pwani affirms the sector's impact: "the sector supports thousands of coastal households, where fishing remains a primary source of income. While small-scale fishers rely on traditional methods to supply local markets, commercial fisheries contribute to national and international trade."[32] Fisheries also drive auxiliary industries like fish processing, transport, and marketing. Youth entrepreneurship is expanding through targeted programs. The *Ustadi Foundation* highlights the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Socio-Economic Development (KEMFSED) project: "It has provided financial support to youth-led self-help groups, enabling them to engage in fish farming, processing, and trade."[33] Despite its promise, the sector faces limitations. Overfishing, habitat loss, and market inefficiencies especially middlemen exploitation reduce profitability.

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[31] Dorcus Sigana, Kenneth Mavuti & Richard Ruwa, "Fish Species Composition and Distribution in Kilifi Creek," in *Peer-Reviewed Journal* (2009): 1-13, 1.

[32] Jumuiya Ya Kaunti Za Pwani, "Go Blue in Kilifi County," retrieved from https://www.goblue.co.ke/sites/default/files/brochures/document/Brochure-Kilifi (accessed 05/05/2025).

[33] Ustadi Foundation, "Sustainably Employing Youth In The Fisheries Sector," retrieved from https://ustadi.org/2020/07/09/sustainably-employing-youth-in-the-fisheries-sector-through-the-vijabiz-project/ (accessed 05/05/2025).

1.8.2 Tourism

Tourism significantly contributes to Kilifi's economy through employment, trade, and infrastructure. The county boasts pristine beaches, heritage sites like Gede Ruins, and vibrant culture, attracting local and international visitors. Elisabeth Valle and Mark Nelson Yobesia emphasize: "Tourism in particular is an important economic activity with potential to play an even bigger role in country's economic production."[34] Tourism supports sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and entertainment. Eco-tourism sites and cultural festivals enhance revenue and promote global connectivity. The industry also boosts processing of local agricultural and artisan products, advancing Kilifi's investment profile. However, the sector faces sustainability challenges. Seasonal tourist fluctuations, environmental degradation, poor infrastructure, and weak policies impede growth. Unregulated developments and informal settlements near tourist zones hinder conservation. Marine ecosystem damage from pollution and overfishing threatens eco-tourism.

Victor Ongoma and Onyango warn: "currently, there is a threat to tourism and the threat is likely to increase with time. According to climate projections; temperature, precipitation, extreme events are on increase."[35] Labor exploitation in hospitality and lack of fair employment practices raise ethical concerns. These vulnerabilities have contributed to moral relativism among youth in tourist-heavy areas. Other issues include commercial sex work and social fragmentation among youth seeking economic survival. Limited formal employment drives short-term informal tourism activities, lacking sustainability. Community-based regulation of exploitative practices is minimal, leaving youth exposed to harmful influences.

1.8.3 Church's Social Institutions: A Response to Ethical Challenges in Tourism

While tourism offers vital economic benefits to Kilifi County, it also presents moral and social challenges especially among the youth. The rise in substance abuse, commercial sex work, and social fragmentation reflects increasing moral relativism in high-tourist areas. As noted by the *National Council for Population and Development (NCPD):* "The influx of visitors has introduced diverse cultural influences, sometimes leading to compromised ethical values, such as

[34] Elisabeth Valle & Mark Nelson Yobesia, "Economic Contribution of Tourism in Kenya," in *Tourism Analysis* 14, no. 3 (2009): 401–414, 401.
[35] Victor Ongoma & Onyango, "A Review of the Future of Tourism in Coastal Kenya: The Challenges and Opportunities Posed by Climate Change," in *Journal of Earth Science & Climatic Change* 5, no. 7 (2014): 1-4, 3.

substance abuse."[36] In response to these ethical concerns, the Catholic Church in Kilifi Deanery has intensified efforts through its expansive network of social institutions. Catholic-sponsored schools including primary and secondary institutions promote moral formation, discipline, and ethical leadership. These schools, distributed across parishes such as Kilifi, Kikambala, Mariakani, Malindi, and Bamba, provide holistic education anchored in Catholic values, fostering resilience and moral clarity among youth.[37] Church-led mentorship and life skills programs complement formal education by addressing core issues of identity, self-worth, and responsible decision-making.

Such initiatives prepare young individuals to navigate complex socio-cultural environments shaped by tourism. Vocational training centers and youth employment initiatives supported by faith-based groups offer practical alternatives to informal tourism-related activities. Programs like *Sisters Led Youth Empowerment Initiative (SLYEI)* equip youth with technical skills and ethical foundations grounded in Catholic social teaching. These efforts are essential in curbing reliance on unstable income sources and reinforcing positive community engagement. Jane Muthoni explains that "Catholic parishes have launched community-based interventions focused on environmental stewardship, gender equity, and social inclusion."[38] Such programs not only address ecological degradation linked to tourism but also build social cohesion and ethical awareness. Through integrated and coordinated efforts, the Catholic Church transforms its social institutions into agents of moral renewal and inclusive development. By aligning spiritual formation with social action, the Church helps ensure that tourism serves as a vehicle for empowerment and sustainable growth rather than exploitation and moral decline despite the social many challenges.

1.8.4 Education Sector

Education has long been a cornerstone of the Catholic Church's evangelizing mission. The *Code of Canon Law* emphasizes: "among the means of advancing education, Christ's faithful are to consider schools as of great importance since they are the principal assistance to parents in fulfilling the function of education. Teachers are to be outstanding in correct doctrine and

[36] National Council for Population and Development (NCPD), *2015 Kenya National Adolescents and Youth Survey (NAYS*) (Nairobi, Kenya: NCPD, 2017), 18.
[37] The Catholic Directory, "Catholic Churches in Kilifi County, Kenya," retrieved from https://www.catholicdirectory.com/kenya/kilifi-county (accessed 11/07/2025).
[38] Jane Muthoni, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 28/02/2024.

integrity of life."[39] This highlights the Church's role in supporting parents and nurturing intellectual and moral development. The Congregation for Catholic Education, in its Circular Letter on Religious Education in Schools, further affirms: "Catholic schools play a particular role in education and formation."[40] This reflects the Church's deep-rooted commitment to empowering youth, not simply as a response to social challenges, but as an expression of its mission. In Kilifi Deanery, Catholic-sponsored institutions integrate academic excellence with spiritual formation. As Thomas Mwale observes: "Catholic schools not only equip students with knowledge but also nurture ethical leadership, discipline, and social responsibility, ensuring that young people grow into well-rounded individuals prepared to contribute positively to society."[41]

The Church invests in infrastructure, teacher training, and scholarships for disadvantaged learners, promoting equitable education across the region. Leading this effort is St. Mary's Teacher Training College in Bura, which prepares educators for academic and moral leadership. Seven secondary schools and fourteen primary schools within Kilifi Deanery support foundational and advanced learning for a wide student population. These institutions illustrate the Church's commitment to accessibility, quality education, and the transformative power of knowledge. In an era of rapid change, education remains vital in shaping resilient youth. As Nelson Mandela famously said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."[42] This principle guides the Church's response to challenges facing youth in Kilifi. Catholic schools and parish programs offer mentorship in ethical decision-making, fostering principled leadership. Strategic partnerships with the County government help improve access, particularly for vulnerable groups.

To assess local challenges, a field study in Kikambala Parish gathered feedback from 40 families, 30 youth leaders, and four Catholic school principals. Using a 5-point Likert Scale, respondents identified five key obstacles: Financial constraints, poor infrastructure, low community engagement, restrictive government policies and shortage of qualified teachers Funding gaps affect facilities and student support. Lack of infrastructure limits effective learning.

[39] *Code of Canon Law*, no.796, § 1 & 803, § 2.
[40] The Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter on Religious Education in Schools* (2009): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 101 (2009), 553-564, no. 5.
[41] Thomas Mwale, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 26/02/2024.
[42] Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," retrieved fromhttps://www.socratic-method.com/quote-meanings/nelson-mandela-education-is-the-most-powerful-weapon-which-you-can-use-to-change-the-world (accessed 10/04/2024).

Limited involvement by parents and youth weakens educational engagement. Policy restrictions constrain curriculum flexibility and funding. Insufficient trained educators lead to gaps in instructional quality. The Likert Scale results are summarized below to illustrate perceptions of these challenges.

Table 1: Perceptions of Educational Challenges in Catholic Schools in Kilifi Deanery

Challenges	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Not Sure (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Financial Constraints	45%	35%	10%	7%	3%
Lack of infrastructure	40%	33%	12%	10%	5%
Low Community engagement	30%	28%	20%	15%	7%
Government Policy Constraints	43%	32%	13%	8%	4%
Shortage of qualified Teachers	50%	30%	10%	7%	3%

The results indicate that financial constraints and shortage of qualified teachers are the most critical challenges, with 80% agreement among respondents. This suggests an urgent need for additional funding and improved teacher recruitment strategies. Infrastructure deficits were also widely acknowledged (73% agreement), highlighting disparities in facility conditions and learning resources. Government policy constraints received 75% agreement, showing that regulatory challenges impact Catholic educational efforts. Community engagement, though ranked the lowest (58% agreement), still requires improvement through increased parental involvement and awareness programs.

1.8.5 Health Sector

Health care is a fundamental service that upholds human dignity, encompassing physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Guided by the belief that every person is made in the image of God, the Catholic Church advocates for comprehensive medical care that honors the wholeness of human life. The *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)* affirms: “Catholic health care has the responsibility to treat those in need in a way that respects the

human dignity and eternal destiny of all. The words of Christ have provided inspiration for Catholic health care: "I was ill and you cared for me" (Mt 25:36)."[43] Similarly, Pope John Paul II emphasized that, "Only by serving man's total well-being can medicine contribute to his progress and happiness."[44] These teachings reflect the Church's enduring mission of compassionate and ethical healing. Pope Francis, addressing health care professionals, asserted:

> Health care is not a luxury but a right that belongs to everyone... A world that rejects the sick, that does not assist those who cannot afford care, is a cynical world with no future. Health is not merely the absence of illness but a state of overall well-being.[45]

This vision is exemplified in Kilifi Deanery through a network of hospitals, dispensaries, clinics, outpatient centers, nursing homes, and *Community-Based Health Care* (CBHC) initiatives.[46] These facilities promote accessibility and dignity while advancing the Church's mission to care for the most vulnerable. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reinforces this obligation: "Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good."[47] In underserved regions such as Arid and Semi-Arid Areas, the Church addresses health disparities where government services often fall short. *The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB)* notes: "In the Arid and Semi-Arid Areas, the Church has and manages mobile clinics for nomadic communities; these are difficult to reach areas that other organizations, including the Government, are not able to provide health services."[48] Through these initiatives, residents of Kilifi County access maternal health services, child nutrition programs, and disease prevention.

Catholic health facilities also engage in public health education, emphasizing sanitation, nutrition, and wellness. They integrate spiritual and psychosocial support to address illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, reinforcing the Church's commitment to social justice. In Kilifi

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[43] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Plenary Assembly, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services Sixth Edition* (Washington, America Press, June 2018), 10.
[44] Pope John Paul II, *Address to the 15th International Conference of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care* (17 November 2000), no. 3.
[45] Pope Francis addressing members of an Italian federation of professional associations of technicians and specialists working in the fields of radiology, rehabilitation, and preventative medicine at the Vatican, January 16, 2023.
[46] Catholic Community-Based Health Care (CBHC) Program is a faith-based initiative under the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa. It was established to provide preventive, curative, and supportive health services to marginalized and vulnerable populations, including those affected by HIV/AIDS, the elderly, orphans, and the poor.
[47] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2288.
[48] Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Catholic Health Department of Kenya (CHDK)," retrieved from https://kccb.or.ke/index.php/catholic-health-commission-of-kenya-chck/ (accessed 07/05/2025).

Deanery, health care provision is a shared effort among government bodies, NGOs, and faith-based institutions. Current data for Kilifi County (South), the focus area of this study indicates 57 total health facilities: Government-owned facilities are forty, NGO owned healthcare facilities are twelve and Church-owned facilities are five.[49] Where government and NGO infrastructures are limited, Catholic outreach programs fill critical gaps. These efforts affirm the Church's ethical responsibility to promote healing and equity, ensuring no community is left behind.

Table 2: Distribution of Healthcare Facilities in Kilifi Deanery

Ownership Type	Hospitals	Health Centers	Dispensaries	Total Facilities
Government	4	10	26	40
Non-Governmental	2	4	6	12
Church	1	2	2	5
Total	7	16	34	57

This comparative analysis highlights the distribution of healthcare facilities in Kilifi Deanery among government, NGOs, and faith-based organizations. Government institutions account for 70%, focusing on primary care and preventive services. NGOs manage 21%, offering specialized treatment and outreach in underserved regions. The Catholic Church contributes 9%, integrating health services with its mission of social justice, notably in maternal care, HIV/AIDS counseling, and community outreach. This multi-sectoral model improves access to care but reveals a pressing need for infrastructure development and stronger coordination to achieve equitable healthcare delivery.

1.9 The Social Setting

The Midzi-Chenda community, part of the Mijikenda ethnic group, maintains a structured social system rooted in clan-based organization and age-set hierarchies. Elders hold central roles

[49] Brian Yano, "Kilifi County NHIF Latest List of Approved Facilities/ Hospitals: Location, Contacts, Services, Hospital Type and Code in March 25, 2025," retrieved from https://educationnewshub.co.ke/kilifi-county-nhif-latest-list-of-approved-facilities-hospitals-location-contacts-services-hospital-type-and-code/ (accessed 10/05/2025).

in governance and cultural preservation, guiding moral conduct and community cohesion. Their fortified villages, or kayas, serve as sacred spaces for spiritual practice, communal rituals, and ancestral reverence. Social life is deeply embedded in tradition, expressing a strong sense of collective identity. As John A. Clausen notes: "Socialization is the means by which social and cultural continuity is attained."[50] For the Midzi-Chenda, socialization is a lifelong process shaping values, norms, and communal belonging. John Kazungu elaborates:

> Among the Midzi-Chenda people, socialization is a lifelong process that instills cultural values, norms, and communal identity. It begins within the family, where elders play a key role in teaching traditions, respect, and responsibility. The age-set system further reinforces social structure, guiding individuals through initiation rites that prepare them for adulthood and leadership.[51]

Ceremonial practices, communal gatherings, and sacred kaya forests facilitate intergenerational transmission of ancestral knowledge. Music, dance, and oral storytelling educate youth while preserving historical memory and social values. This structured cultural framework promotes discipline, solidarity, and continuity.

1.9.1 Gender Roles and Social Organization

Traditional Midzi-Chenda society is governed by a gerontocratic structure, where authority resides primarily with elder men. Chilekwa Mumba defines gerontocracy as: "a state or group governed by old people."[52] Within this hierarchy, older men exert control over younger men and women, reinforcing patriarchal norms and shaping gender roles. Men are traditionally viewed as public decision-makers, while women are linked to domestic responsibilities and caregiving. As Elizabeth C. Orchardson observes "sexual differentiation among the Midzi-Chenda people became more and more defined as boys and girls grew up. The activities which 'belong' to men and those that 'belong' to women tend to merge when children are young."[53] Nelly Keya adds that "in gender role formation among the Midzi-Chenda Communities, gender roles are well explained. While childhood socialization allowed for some flexibility in gender roles, societal expectations progressively imposed structured roles as individuals aged."[54] During

[50] John A. Clausen (ed.), *Socialization and Society* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1968), 5.
[51] John Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 28/02/2024.
[52] Chilekwa Mumba, "Gerontocracy: Rule of Old in African Culture," retrieved from https://www.globalblackhistory.com/gerontocracy-rule-old-african-culture/ (accessed 21/05/2025).
[53] Elizabeth C. Orchardson, *A Socio-Historical Perspective of the Art and Material Culture of the Mijikenda of Kenya* (London: ProQuest LLC, 2017), 41.
[54] Nelly Keya, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 25/02/2025.

early childhood, boys and girls share similar tasks. With age, cultural norms impose distinct roles: men engage in farming, leadership, and community governance; women assume household management and child-rearing duties. Susan Dama provides symbolic insight into gender role reinforcement:

> Traditional upbringing included early exposure to tools and objects associated with adult responsibilities. For instance, a baby girl was introduced to household and agricultural tools such as a winnowing tray, mortar, and farming implements, signifying her future role as a homemaker and farmer. Elder women played a crucial role in mentoring young girls in all aspects of womanhood. Conversely, baby boys were presented with weapons and farming tools, indicating their expected roles as defenders of the family and cultivators. These formative experiences reinforced societal expectations and prepared children for their designated roles.[55]

Labor divisions were defined by both age and gender. Boys assisted in herding and farming; girls aided in domestic chores. This collective socialization ensured transmission of cultural roles and sustained the gerontocratic system. In recent years, traditional gender roles have undergone significant transformation. Formal education, urban migration, and socioeconomic change have challenged rigid norms. Increased female participation in professional, educational, and political spheres reflects growing recognition of gender equality and shared responsibilities. While elements of tradition remain, contemporary Midzi-Chenda society increasingly embraces inclusive and adaptive gender roles.

1.9.2 Cultural Values of the Midzi-Chenda people

Culture forms the foundation of identity, social cohesion, and ethical formation. Among the Midzi-Chenda people, cultural heritage is rooted in communal traditions, spirituality, and environmental stewardship. Edward Burnett Tylor defines culture as: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, law, customs, and any other capabilities acquired by people as a member of a particular society.”[56] This definition captures the richness of Midzi-Chenda customs, including rituals, language, and artistic expressions that preserve identity and social order. Central to this culture is the respect for elders, who serve as custodians of tradition, arbiters in societal decisions, and spiritual guides. The sacred kaya forests, revered as ancestral and ecological sanctuaries, symbolize this enduring connection to heritage and nature. Aylward Shorter expands the concept of culture, describing it as: “a pattern of values and meanings

[55] Susan Dama, interviewed by the research, at Majengo, Kikambala Parish, 26/02/2024.
[56] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray Albemarie Street, 1991), 1.

expressed through images and symbols, which is transmitted by a human society and enables them to communicate and develop their understanding of life."[57]

Transmission of Midzi-Chenda culture occurs through enculturation, which Ary Roest Crollius defines as: "the learning process through which an individual is initiated into and gradually assimilates the values, norms, and practices of their culture."[58] This process is evident in rites of passage, particularly initiation ceremonies for both boys and girls, which mark the transition into adulthood. John Kaye observes:

> Among the Midzi-Chenda, this is evident in rites of passage, particularly initiation ceremonies that mark the transition into adulthood. While traditional circumcision practices have evolved due to modernization, their cultural significance remains intact, with elders mentoring young men on societal responsibilities. Cultural transmission extends to women and young girls through rites of passage that mark their transition into adulthood. Traditionally, these ceremonies prepared girls for social responsibilities, marriage, and motherhood, reinforcing their roles within the community.[59]

While traditional circumcision for boys and social grooming for girls were once central, modernization has led to alternative rites that promote education, leadership, and reproductive health, abandoning harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM). John Kazungu reinforces this evolution:

> Ancestral veneration is another cornerstone of Midzi-Chenda culture, particularly within the sacred Kaya forests, where prayers and offerings are made to honor ancestors and seek their blessings. Traditional dances such as Kifudu, performed during funerals, and Sengenya, which symbolizes unity and celebration, serve as expressions of communal solidarity and identity. Marriage ceremonies among the Midzi-Chenda retain traditional elements, including dowry negotiations and blessings from elders. Naming rituals for newborns remain culturally significant, with names carefully chosen based on family lineage or spiritual guidance.[60]

Dress code serves as an outward symbol of identity, shared across Swahili and Midzi-Chenda cultures. Miriam Kadzo explains: "Women are identified by garments such as *bui bui*, *dera*, brightly colored *khangas*, and *vikoys*, which reflect cultural heritage while adapting to the

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[57] Aylward Shorter, "New Attitudesto African Culture and African Religions," in *Towards African Christian Maturity*, (eds), J. M. Waliggo, W. Amewowo (Kampala: St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1987), 18-28.
[58] Ary Roest Crollius, "Inculturation: Newness and Ongoing Process," in *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, (eds.), J. M. Waliggo, T. Nkeramihigo (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1986), 30-45.
[59] John Kaye, interviewed by the researcher, at Maweni, 27/02/2025.
[60] John Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 28/02/2024.

warm and humid climate of Mombasa and Kilifi."[61] Attire varies by climate, personal preference, and religious affiliation, yet remains a strong marker of cultural pride and continuity. Cultural values among the Midzi-Chenda such as truth, justice, respect, integrity, and love, guide interpersonal conduct and reinforce societal cohesion. Aylward Shorter defines values as "the worth we ascribe to a choice, choice of an object, an opinion, a course of action, a relationship, a role, an experience."[62] According to John Mbiti affirms: "values safeguard and uphold the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the world around them."[63] From this perspective, individual actions bear communal implications. Samuel Bedijo stresses: "An action or attitude that blocks the progress of human value is sensitive to the community."[64] This ethic challenges moral relativism, which promotes subjective morality at odds with communitarian norms.

Cultural practices such as naming rituals and *mung'aro* (initiation rites) underscore the Midzi-Chenda's dedication to preserving ancestral wisdom while adapting to contemporary realities. The broader analysis of Kilifi Deanery's social, cultural, and religious landscape reveals how these values interact with modern influences. Demographic patterns, political structures, religious beliefs, and economic conditions shape youth identity and ethical orientation. The Catholic Church, under the Archdiocese of Mombasa, offers a stabilizing moral framework through teaching rooted in the Golden Rule *"Treat others as you wish to be treated "* (Mt.7:12). This universal principle provides a counterbalance to the uncertainties introduced by moral relativism and affirms the role of communal ethics in guiding youth towards responsible citizenship.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the overview of Kilifi deanery has been discussed by highlighting the geographical location whereby the environmental features have been stressed. The demographic

[61] Miriam Kadzo, Interviewed by the researcher, Kikambala, 28/02/2024.
[62] Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology: Adaptation or Inculturation?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 111.
[63] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed., reprint (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2003), 12.
[64] Samuel Bedijo, *The Moral Problem Posed by Individualism in the Church in Africa A Case Study in Nebbi Catholic Diocese in North-Western Uganda* (German: EOS Verlag Sankt Ottilien, 2013), 61.

information has provided a comprehensive situation under which the population statistics and the settlements have been presented. The history of the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa has been highlighted together with a brief account of Kilifi deanery and its predominant inhabitants. The work further explored the social, cultural, economic, religious, and the political dimension of the Midzi-Chenda people. The Second Chapter discusses the challenges of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHALLENGES OF MORAL RELATIVISM AMONG THE YOUTH IN KILIFI DEANERY

Introduction

Moral relativism presents a profound challenge for the youth in Kilifi Deanery as they grapple with the dynamic interplay between traditional values and modern influences within an increasingly diverse and evolving society. This ideological shift has contributed to ethical uncertainty and the transformation of behavioral norms, thereby affecting both individual and communal moral foundations.

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of four fundamental aspects of moral relativism, offering a comprehensive exploration of its broader implications. First, it establishes a conceptual framework for moral relativism, outlining its defining principles and philosophical foundations. Second, it explores the specific challenges faced by the youth in Kilifi Deanery, highlighting the tensions between inherited ethical norms and emerging personal and societal ideologies. Third, it investigates the underlying causes of moral relativism, focusing on globalization, the rise of alternative religious movements, evolving leadership structures, and shifting parental influences. Finally, the chapter assesses its far-reaching impact, particularly its role in fostering individualism, secularism, materialism, tribalism, and corruption, all of which shape the moral and social fabric of the community.

2.1 The Concept of Moral Relativism

The moral landscape in Kilifi Deanery is undergoing significant transformation as traditional ethical values encounter modern influences as moral relativism is a significant concern among the youth. According to Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, "moral relativism refers to the idea that moral judgments and values are context-dependent and vary across different individuals or cultures. A belief that decisions about right and wrong are purely personal and subjective."[65] This definition highlights the shifting ethical perspectives among the

[65] Karl Rahner & Herbert Vorgrimler, *Concise Theological Dictionary Second Edition* (London: Herders, 1981), 436.

youth as they navigate diverse cultural, social, and ideological influences. Rahner and Vorgrimler's assertion that moral judgments are context-dependent aligns with the reality that young people encounter multiple frameworks for morality, from traditional communal values to modern, individualistic ethics, resulting in differing interpretations of right and wrong. Carlo Invernizzi Accetti further describes moral relativism as: ascribe

> An invisible gas, odorless, and deadly, that is now polluting every free society on earth. It is a gas that attacks the central nervous system of moral striving. The most perilous threat to the free society today is, therefore, neither political nor economic. It is the poisonous, corrupting culture of relativism. . . . Accetti lists seven evil and destructive effects of relativism: 1) Relativism commits treason against God. 2) Relativism cultivates duplicity. 3) Relativism conceals doctrinal defection. 4) Relativism cloaks greed with flattery. 5) Relativism cloaks pride with the guise of humility. 6) Relativism enslaves people. 7) Relativism leads to brutal totalitarianism.[66]

Accetti portrays moral relativism as a corrosive force undermining societal and spiritual integrity. As a result, relativism erodes absolute moral principles, fosters deception, disguises moral weakness, and paves the way for unchecked individualism and authoritarianism. As Tom Beauchamp observed "moral relativism makes sin relative because every action is looked at from a personal point of view."[67] This suggests that moral relativism removes fixed definitions of sin, allowing individuals to judge actions based on personal perspectives rather than universal moral standards. This perception has led to ethical ambiguity among the youth in Kilifi Deanery, where moral judgments vary depending on context, culture, or individual beliefs, rather than being guided by absolute principles. In his view, relativism threatens faith, honesty, and social stability, ultimately leading to moral and ideological decay.

It is important to note that morality is what makes up a community. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines morality as "code of conduct put forward by a society and accepted by the members of that society."[68] This definition serves as a foundation of communal identity and ethical behaviour. However, moral relativism underscores that morality is no longer solely anchored in inherited norms but shaped by personal experiences, global interactions, and evolving societal expectations. This is the reality among the youth in Kilifi Deanery. Ethical

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[66] Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, *Relativism and Religion: Why Democratic Societies do not Need Moral Absolutes* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2015), 15.

[67] Tom Beauchamp, "Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy," retrieved from https://archive.org/details/philosophicaleth0000beau (accessed 31/01/2025).

[68] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "The Definition of Morality," retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/morality-definition/ (accessed 23/07/2024).

decisions among the youth increasingly reflect subjective interpretations rather than universally accepted moral standards. This relativistic approach has led to challenges such as ethical uncertainty, weakened communal values, leading to moral conflicts and insecurity in Kilifi County. John Mwenje explains:

> With increasing exposure to globalization, technological advancements, and diverse ideological perspectives, youth in Kilifi Deanery are encountering multiple conflicting moral standards. This has led to an evolving interpretation of morality, where decisions about right and wrong are influenced not only by societal norms but also by individual experiences, peer influences, and external cultural forces.[69]

2.2 Challenges of Moral Relativism

In an increasingly multicultural and interconnected society, the youth in Kilifi Deanery encounter diverse worldviews that shape their perceptions of morality. As traditional ethical systems intersect with modern ideologies, the once-clear boundaries between right and wrong become blurred, fostering uncertainty in moral decision-making. The exposure to various cultural norms, religious beliefs, and global influences has led to a shift in values, creating tensions between inherited traditions and emerging perspectives. John Mwenje remarked that "among the Midzi-Chenda people, traditional moral values have historically guided social interactions, shaping expectations for responsible young individuals who demonstrate personal integrity."[70] However, with the influence of globalization, technological advancements, and exposure to diverse ideologies, the youth are encountering multiple perspectives on morality, leading to a shift in ethical interpretation. While some continue to adhere to inherited traditions, others navigate evolving moral standards shaped by personal experiences, peer dynamics, and external cultural forces.

The shift in moral perspectives among the youth in Kilifi Deanery has heightened tensions between collective morality and individual autonomy, significantly impacting ethical decision-making and social cohesion. The growing perception that moral standards are subjective, determined by personal viewpoints rather than established communal values has led to uncertainty in distinguishing right from wrong among the youth in Kilifi Deanery. This relativistic mindset encourages moral detachment, fostering an attitude of "to each their own"

[69] John Mwenje, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 27/01/2024.
[70] John Mwenje, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 27/01/2024.

and those who follow it say, who am I to judge?[71] This perception is diminishing accountability in ethical matters. Given that his study specifically addresses moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery, the phrase "among the youth" is important in the study. As youth are in formative stages of developing, their beliefs and values are easily influenced by whichever wind that comes their way. It therefore essential to establish a clear definition of who qualifies as youth.

For the purposes of this study, the term "youth" is aligned with the definition provided by key policy frameworks. Both the African Youth Charter and the East African Community (EAC) Youth Policy define youth as "persons aged between 15 and 35 years."[72] This broad age range recognizes the diverse experiences that characterize youth, from adolescence to early adulthood. It underscores the transitionary nature of this stage, where individuals move from dependency to autonomy, shaping their identities, ethical perspectives, and societal roles. This definition is crucial in framing the study's discourse on moral relativism, as it acknowledges the period in which individuals are most vulnerable to external influences and ideological shifts. However, the definition by age often varies from country to country, depending on specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors. In the Constitution of Kenya, a youth is defined as "an individual who has attained the age of eighteen years but has not yet reached the age of thirty-five years."[73] This is a period of transition, from childhood to adulthood and gain equal legal treatment, marking an important stage of personal and societal responsibility. Among the Midzi-Chenda people, a youth is perceived through the age-set system, referred to as *rikas*. Jonnes Muya explains:

> *Rikas* are collective age groups that progress together from childhood to adulthood, undergoing structured rites of passage. This system operates on two levels: every four years, uninitiated boys undergo circumcision, transitioning into a sub-rika, where they assume new duties and responsibilities within society.[74]

[71] Ethics Unwrapped, "The Science of Everyday Ethics," retrieved from https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/moral-relativism# (accessed 27/06/2024).
[72] African Youth Charter, "Prospects for the Development of the African Youth," retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673843.2018.1554498 (accessed 24/08/2024).
[73] *Constitution of Kenya Kenya, 2010, Law Reform Commission* (KLRC), Article 55.
[74] Jonnes Muya, interviewed by the researcher, at Maweni, Kikambala, 25/02/2024.

According to the Synod of Bishops, "the youthful stage a time of experimentation of ups and downs, of hope alternated with fear, and unavoidable tension between positive and negative aspects…"[75] This underscores a dynamic phase filled with exploration, emotional highs and lows, hope mixed with uncertainty, and a natural tension between good and bad experiences. Essentially, it is a formative period where young people navigate challenges, make mistakes, and grow through their experiences. The youthful stage is prone to relativism because young people often explore different perspectives, question traditional beliefs, and seek personal meaning in a rapidly changing world. The Synod of Bishops highlights that in some cultures, religion is seen as a private matter, leading young people to mix elements from various spiritual traditions based on personal preference rather than objective truth. This can result in moral and religious relativism, where all beliefs are considered equally valid, potentially weakening faith and commitment to deeper spiritual truths.

The Synod of Bishops in the final document of the 2018 session on young people, faith, and vocational discernment highlights "the spiritual and religious experiences of young people around the world, both in and outside of the Church, noting that in many places "forms of alternative religiosity are on the rise."[76] The statement acknowledges that young people globally are exploring spirituality in diverse ways, both within traditional religious structures and through alternative forms of belief and practice. The Synod of Bishops' observation about the rise of "alternative religiosity" can be illustrated by the tragic events of Shakahola in Kenya, where a cult leader manipulated followers into extreme beliefs, leading to devastating consequences. This case highlights how some individuals, especially youth, seeking spiritual fulfillment outside traditional religious institutions may fall prey to misleading doctrines. It underscores the need for ethical and theological guidance to help young people navigate diverse spiritual landscapes while avoiding exploitative influences.

These changes have given rise to various moral challenges, including promiscuity, fraudulent behavior, substance abuse, alcoholism, widespread 'miguka' chewing, insecurity, theft, and violent crime. Such issues have severely disrupted the moral fabric of the youth,

[75] XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris,* On Young People Faith and Vocation Discernment (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2018), no. 16.
[76] Catholic News Agency, "Youth synod document says faith can combat relativism," retrieved from https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/40274/youth-synod-document-says-faith-can-combat-relativism (accessed 09/06/2025)

leaving them vulnerable to ethical instability and confusion. As they struggle to reconcile conflicting moral perspectives, they become increasingly susceptible to external influences that erode foundational ethical principles. The prevalence of these concerns highlights the urgent need to investigate the root causes of moral relativism and its impact on the younger generation. Addressing these challenges is essential to restoring a stable ethical framework and reinforcing a sense of moral accountability among the youth in Kilifi Deanery.

2.3 Causes of Moral Relativism

The rise of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery stems from a complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural shifts. Exposure to diverse ideologies and weakened communal values has led to ethical uncertainty, making it increasingly difficult for young people to distinguish between right and wrong. As societal norms shift, moral standards become fluid, contributing to an erosion of foundational values among the younger generation. This erosion is particularly concerning given the vulnerabilities young people face during their developmental years. Socio-economic and political challenges including economic crises, weak governmental legitimacy, widespread poverty, electoral disputes, insecurity, and developmental stagnation affect the youth, limiting opportunities and fostering disillusionment. Willy Mutunga emphasizes:

> The crisis facing Kenya, like other African countries such as tribalism, corruption, weak governance, poverty and underdevelopment etc., are a reflection of the quality of the elite, who are largely driven by self-interest, greed, opportunism and materialism. These elite are also highly regarded as role models, hence their dishonest practices can set bad examples for the youth and society in general.[77]

Mutunga highlights how self-serving leadership fosters corruption, tribalism, and weak governance, shaping a society where dishonesty and materialism are normalized. The elite, protected by their influence, manipulate laws to serve their interests, setting a harmful precedent that undermines ethical integrity. As a result, young people grow up in an environment where fraudulent practices and individualism are seen as necessary for success, eroding traditional moral values. In Kilifi Deanery, these patterns have contributed to widespread moral uncertainty among the youth. Economic struggles, unemployment, and insecurity have further weakened ethical foundations, leaving many susceptible to corruption as a means of survival. With moral

[77] Willy Mutunga, "Inequality and the Moral Crisis of the Elite," *Development*, 57 (2014): 340 -343.

relativism taking root, ethical accountability diminishes, reinforcing a culture where dishonesty and self-interest overshadow communal responsibility. The following discussion examines the key factors driving this shift, exploring how globalization, leadership failures, parental influence, and emerging ideologies shape the moral landscape of young individuals.

2.3.1 Emerging Religious Movements

Kenya has witnessed the growth of various religious sects and movements, encompassing both mainstream denominations and unconventional groups. While the terms "sect" and "movement" are often used interchangeably, they carry distinct meanings. According to William Richey Hogg and Carter H. Lindberg, a sect refers to "a subgroup that has separated from a larger religious tradition, retaining some connection to its original faith while emphasizing specific doctrines or practices."[78] In contrast, Margaret Gathoni Gecaga defines a religious movement as "a collective mobilization of individuals seeking to redefine humanity's relationship with fundamental existential questions, including life, death, and societal interactions."[79] In Kilifi County, the emergence of the Shakahola cult illustrates the impact of new religious movements. Led by Pastor Paul Mackenzie of the Good News International Church, the cult attracted followers from across Kenya, promoting extreme doctrines that led to tragic consequences. As Fathima Azmiya notes, "members were encouraged to fast to death in anticipation of "meeting Jesus" in the afterlife"[80] as an act of faith.

While Article 32 of the Kenyan Constitution protects freedom of worship, the discovery of mass graves in Shakahola forest brought national and international attention to the dangers posed by unchecked religious extremism. President William Ruto expressed grave concern over the Shakahola incident, stating that it was "akin to terrorism and, opened up a new epoch in which Kenyans can begin to look at all religions as potential incubators of extremism. He

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[78] William Richey Hogg and Carter H. Lindberg, "Church, Sect, and Mystical Movement, Encyclopedia Britannica," retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Church-sect-and-mystical-movement (accessed 09.06/2024)

[79] Margaret Gathoni Gecaga, "Religious Movements and Democratization in Kenya: Between the Sacred and the Profane," in *Kenya: The Struggle for Democracy, (eds.)* Godwin Murunga & Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o (New York: Zed Books publications, 2007), 58-89, 61.

2 Elisabeth Arweck, *Researching New Religious Movements: Responses and Redefinitions* (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2017), 2

[80] Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen, "Shakahola Cult: New Era in Battle against Religious Extremism," retrieved from https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2023-05-09-shakahola-cult-new-era-in-battle-against-religious-extremism/ (accessed 26/06/2024).

referred to it as similar to ‘terrorism’ and Mackenzie as a ‘criminal’ that belongs in jail. He pledged a crackdown on “unacceptable”[81] religious movements. Kadzo Juma explains:

> Economic hardship and unmet spiritual needs led many, especially unemployed youth, to join the Shakahola cult, drawn by promises of jobs and land. Emerging religious movements reshape moral perspectives through charismatic leadership, apocalyptic beliefs, and communal isolation. The cult's tragic fast-to-death practice underscores the dangers of unchecked extremism and its role in moral relativism among youth in Kilifi Deanery.[82]

2.3.2 Parental Reinforcement

Parents are central to shaping their children's moral values, beliefs, and behaviors. From an early age, children internalize parental guidance, which influences their ethical outlook and decision-making. Nancy Eisenberg defines parental reinforcement as “a positive discipline approach that aims at shaping behaviour by emphasizing the positive aspects while reframing missteps as opportunities for learning.”[83] Encouraging positive actions through praise and support fosters moral development, helping children build integrity and accountability. However, parental reinforcement can also contribute to moral relativism when cultural traditions dictate moral standards. In the Midzi-Chenda community, gender roles and expectations have historically reinforced patriarchal norms, shaping societal values and governance structures. As Mary Mbeyu notes, “definition of gender roles and ethical code of conduct among the Midzi-Chenda community are central and governance system have been historically male-dominated.”[84] This system places men in positions of authority, dictating roles, ethical norms, and leadership decisions, which in turn shapes gender relations and moral perceptions.

One of the most concerning consequences of this cultural framework is the normalization of domestic violence. As Jane Kadzo explains, “Within these traditions, domestic violence is sometimes interpreted as an expression of love.” For example, if a woman is physically disciplined by her husband, it may be seen as a demonstration of care rather than abuse.”[85] This

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[81] Irene Mwangi, “Kenya: 'Heads Will Roll' - Ruto Apologizes over Government Failure on Shakahola Cult Deaths,” retrieved from https://allafrica.com/stories/202305150369.html (accessed 09/06/2025).
[82] Kadzo Juma, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kazengo village, 15/01/2024.
[83] Nancy Eisenberg, “Parental values, reinforcement, and young children's pro-social behavior: a longitudinal study,” retrieved from https://www.bing.com/search?q=parental%20values%20reinforcement%20abstract%20&qs=ds&form=QBRE (accessed 25/04/2024).
[84] A village elder, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 18/01/2024.
[85] Jane Kadzo, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kazengo village, 15/01/2024.

belief system legitimizes violence within relationships, making it socially acceptable and difficult to challenge. Cultural conditioning fosters moral relativism, wherein harmful practices are justified based on tradition rather than universal ethical principles. This relativistic approach to morality complicates legal interventions aimed at protecting women from gender-based violence. When traditions override objective moral standards, efforts to enforce justice face resistance, as societal norms perceive such interventions as unnecessary or intrusive. Consequently, women in Kilifi County remain vulnerable, often trapped in cycles of abuse and economic hardship due to systemic inequalities.

While cultural diversity is valuable, norms that reinforce exclusion and discrimination perpetuate social injustice. The Golden Rule, which advocates treating others with dignity and fairness, offers a moral guide for Kilifi County. Parents play a crucial role in instilling ethical values that transcend harmful traditions, fostering equity, respect, and justice in the upbringing of children. Strengthening parental influence in promoting universally accepted moral principles can be instrumental in combating gender disparities and moral relativism in Kilifi County.

2.3.3 Poverty

Economic hardship in Kilifi County has left many youth without access to education, employment, or even basic necessities, forcing them into cycles of deprivation that increase their vulnerability to crime and risky behaviors. Poverty, as Constance Bansikiza describes, is fundamentally "lack of the basic needs of livelihood,"[86] emphasizing its restrictive impact on individual and societal progress. Similarly, Jonathan Sacks characterizes poverty as "a kind of death" and "worse than 50 plagues,"[87] highlighting its profound and destructive consequences. This dire reality reveals how economic instability not only threatens physical well-being but also erodes hope, dignity, and opportunities for a meaningful future. Beyond material deprivation, poverty creates insecurity, social exclusion, and moral uncertainty. Youth in Kilifi Deanery face significant socio-economic challenges, including unemployment, limited access to education, and resource constraints, which perpetuate cycles of poverty. John Mbaya highlights that "financial hardship has led to a rise in school dropouts, many of whom turn to bodaboda

[86] Constance Bansikiza, *Responding to Poverty in Africa* (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 2007), 18.
[87] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: MPG Books Ltd, 2003), 97.

(motorcycle taxi) businesses for survival."[88] For instance, if one happens to visit Kilifi County, one of the first things you will notice are groupings of young men chewing miguka also known as khat or miraa, and other addictive substances like tobacco, cigarette and bhang. Many of them are associated with drug use, rebellion, or criminal activity. While bodaboda business provides economic relief, it never misses some advantages. Johnson Dama notes that "some riders exploit their mobility for illicit activities, including theft, drug trafficking, and organized crime such as stealing, pickpocketing, kidnapping and raping, exacerbating insecurity in the region. It has led to increased teen pregnancy and school dropouts; insecurities and immorality in the area. Additionally, financial desperation has fueled commercial sex work, particularly in Mtwapa, often referred to as 'sin city' tells it all."[89] It exemplifies how financial desperation drives young women into commercial sex work, deepening socio-economic inequalities.

The youth in Kilifi County face a formidable socio-economic crisis, where poverty, limited education, and scarce opportunities fuel crime and moral relativism. Jane Kadzo emphasizes that "Kilifi's youth suffer from hunger, illiteracy, addiction, and exploitation, making it nearly impossible to escape poverty."[90] While Jose Rizal's assertion that "the youth is the hope of the nation"[91] emphasizes their potential, the grim realities of Kilifi contradict this ideal. Despite their ability to shape and transform society, challenges such as substance abuse including *mnazi* (local traditional beer), tobacco, marijuana, and khat, alongside other social immoralities, hinder their development. The prevalence of these issues underscores how limited access to education and job opportunities reinforces a cycle of despair, pushing adolescents into survival-based ethical decisions.

Peter Townsend expands on the nature of poverty, arguing that "Poverty is not only a lack of money or material possessions but also as a lack of access to resources, which make it extremely difficult for people to participate fully in the society and be accepted by larger social

[88] John Mbaya, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa Market, 25/02/2024.
[89] Johnson Dama, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa Market, 25/02/2024. "Pickpocketing is a form of theft that involves the stealing of money or other valuables from the person or a victim's pocket without them noticing the theft at the time. Pickpocketing is a concern in Kilifi deanery."
[90] Jane Kadzo, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa Market, 25/02/2024.
[91] Jose Rizal: "The youth is the hope of our future," retrieved from https://www.socratic-method.com/quote-meanings-and-interpretations/jose-rizal-the-youth-is-the-hope-of-our-future (accessed 23/07/2024).

groups."[92] This widening economic gap further entrenches inequality, affecting youth access to education, social mobility, healthcare, and other fundamental life necessities. When basic needs remain unmet, crime often becomes a means of survival, reinforcing negative societal outcomes. Sacks poignantly observes that "Nothing is harder to bear than poverty, because he who is crushed by poverty is like a person to whom all the troubles of the world cling upon... If all other troubles were placed one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all."[93] This statement resonates deeply with Kilifi's youth, who struggle under its weight for survival. Stan Chu Ilo further illustrates poverty's impact, asserting that "Poverty robs people of their humanity … It closes the doors to life. Making life a tale of pain and sorrow and a journey into the uncertain land of want and frustration."[94] This is a reality reflected in Kilifi County.

Johnson Dama underscores that "financial constraints prevent many parents from providing quality education, limiting children's prospects and perpetuating inequality."[95] The global economic transformations brought by globalization have further reshaped morality, as financial struggles push youth into desperate choices for survival. These shifting socio-economic dynamics blur ethical boundaries, reinforcing the tendency to prioritize immediate needs over long-term values. As poverty continues to define the lives of many young people in Kilifi, targeted interventions that increase access to education, economic opportunities, and social support systems remain critical to breaking the cycle and fostering a brighter future for the next generation.

2.3.4 Globalization

Globalization is undeniably a significant and enduring aspect of our modern world and the way to go. We cannot go forward by going backward. While it provides pathways for international collaboration and economic growth, it also raises concerns about cultural erosion and economic disparities. Jennifer Gidley characterizes globalization as "a form of western ethnocentrism and patronizing cultural imperialism, which invades local cultures and lifestyles, deepening the insecurities of indigenous identities and contributes to the erosion of national

[92] Peter Townsend, "Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living," retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520325760-011 (accessed 10/06/2024).
[93] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, 98.
[94] Stan Chu Ilo, *The Face of Africa: Looking Beyond the Shadows* (Bloomington: Author House, 2006), 129-130.
[95] Johnson Dama, interviewed by the researcher, at Majengo, Kikambala, 24/02/2024.

cultures and historical traditions."[96] This distinction underscores the need to separate globalization from cultural imperialism. Globalization, while originally intended to foster unity through cultural exchange and shared global standards, has evolved into a force with both constructive and disruptive consequences. Mike Strauss highlights how cultural imperialism creates a hierarchy of cultures, reinforcing superiority and inferiority complexes. He states that "this tension disrupts the organic dynamism of culture,"[97] which Clifford Sibani defines as "the totality of life, all the unique characteristics of *how* people live, believe and interact with each other and with their environment."[98] Instead of fostering mutual exchange, cultural imperialism imposes dominant narratives, suppressing diversity and reshaping identities in ways that favor certain traditions over others.

Jonathan Sacks furthers this discussion by describing globalization as "a double-edged sword, on one hand, it brings us closer together than ever before, interweaving our lives across, nationally and globally, in complex and inextricable ways. On the other hand, globalization is a new tribalism, a regression to older and more fractious loyalties, driving us ever more angrily apart."[99] In this hyper-connected world, while globalization enables broad, distant connections, it often leads to neglect of immediate, local relationships. We find ourselves linked yet isolated, together yet unavailable. Beyond culture, globalization has significantly reshaped socio-economic conditions, especially for younger generations. While it expands access to education and employment opportunities, it also exacerbates inequality, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. Sacks warns:

> Globalized planet is rapidly becoming one in which wealth is ever more unevenly distributed, in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Each year there are more billionaires. Each year millions die of starvation, poverty and preventable disease. Globalization has turned the planet into a single market … whereby, inequality exists both within and between countries. Globalization is fire, and like fire, it warms but it also burns. And we are the guardians of the flame… Technology and global trade are transforming our world almost faster than we can bear. This has brought benefits to many, but distress, disruption and poverty to many others whose voice we must also hear.[100]

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[96] Jennifer Gidley, "Globalization and its Impact on Youth," *Journal of Futures Studies* 6, no. 1 (2001): 89-106.
[97] Mike Strauss, "Difference between Globalization and Imperialism," retrieved from https://www.politicsphere.com/difference-between-globalization-and-imperialism/ (accessed 28/06/2024).
[98] Clifford Meesua Sibani, "Impact of Western Culture on Traditional African Societies: Problems and Prospects," *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2018): 56-72.
[99] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, 7.
[100] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, 108 & 11.

One of the major consequences of globalization, particularly in Kilifi County, is the imposition of Western norms and values on African traditions, leading to cultural erosion among the youth. Traditional moral frameworks of the Midzi-Chenda people have been increasingly overshadowed by external influences, altering ethical reasoning and cultural identity. While globalization fosters connectivity, it also disrupts indigenous practices, weakening communal values and social cohesion. Additionally, Kilifi's proximity to Mombasa, a major coastal hub has made it vulnerable to illicit activities, including the trafficking and distribution of narcotics. Mombasa's port serves as a key entry point for drugs, which are then disseminated locally or transported to other destinations. As a result, the accessibility of substances such as heroin, cocaine, *muguka*, and bhang has fueled addiction and contributed to socio-economic instability among young people.

A 2024 survey by the *National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA)* highlights the alarming extent of substance abuse in the region. The findings indicate that 25% of youth aged 15-24 in Mombasa and Kilifi use drugs, compared to the national average of 6%. The most commonly abused drugs are heroin, cocaine, *Muguka* and bhang (cannabis).[101] This rise in addiction has exacerbated unemployment, crime, and declining mental health, particularly among school dropouts. Chronic use of substances such as *muguka* has led to severe health consequences, including insomnia, mouth ulcers, and cognitive impairment. As Ken observed, "From January to May 2024, the number of *muguka* users has spiked from 1,000 to 1,500. Others have been referred to Port Reitz mental facility for further treatment. The side effects make them feel numb, slow, and mentally foggy, like they are in a 'zombie' state."[102] The accessibility and affordability of drugs exacerbate the crisis, particularly for marginalized youth struggling with economic hardship.

Zubeda Juma (not her real name), a former drug user, shares her experience: "I started using drugs at the age of 16. Some substances are cheap, like *muguka*, which costs between Sh20-50 per packet and is readily available. Unlike other hard drugs sold discreetly, *muguka's* accessibility makes it a preferred option for many young people in Kilifi County."[103] The

[101] Ken Muli, "How Drug Abuse is Turning Mombasa's Youth into Zombies," retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-drug-abuse-turning-mombasas-youth-zombies-ken-muli-acim-cq1lf (accessed 11/06/2024).
[102] Ken Muli, "How Drug Abuse is Turning Mombasa's Youth into Zombies."
[103] Zubeda Juma, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 26/02/2024.

widespread availability of such substances has normalized drug use, fueling addiction and socio-economic instability. Mombasa, a major drug trafficking hub, facilitates the flow of illicit substances into Kilifi County, where drug dens contribute to insecurity and unemployment, as noted by Lydia Mwawasi "drug dens in Mombasa have been linked to insecurity and political unrest with drug abuse contributing to unemployment and criminal activities."[104] . Furthermore, globalization has accelerated cultural exchange, leading to moral relativism among the youth, who struggle with ethical decision-making amid foreign influences. Exposure to global ideologies has weakened traditional values, compounding societal challenges in Kilifi County. Through this lens, globalization presents both promise and peril, requiring a conscious effort to balance integration with the preservation of cultural and social identities.

2.3.5 Identity Politics of Division

Politicized identities appear to promote division in a multi-ethnic societies, often shaping political instability and ethnic tensions. Mike Ikenna and Stephen Nnaemeka define identity as identity as "the way individuals or groups of people define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture."[105] Joseph Karbowski underscores Aristotle's assertion:

> Human beings are inherently political creatures, a foundational concept in Aristotelian political philosophy that has been widely examined in scholarly discourse. He draws parallels between human societies and other broadly political species, noting that each species pursue common ends. Bees promote the good of the hive, wasps that of the nest, etc. Nonetheless, every broadly political species has a shared end, a shared way of life that all of its members promote in different ways. This is true of human beings. They collectively pursue a common end through a differentiation of roles or tasks as political beings.[106]

[104] Lydia Mwawasi, "Mombasa Drug Dens: Insecurity and Political Unrest," retrieved from https://jhkea.org/2021/08/29/mombasa-drug-dens-insecurity-and-political-unrest/ (accessed 12/06/2024).
[105] Ikenna Mike Alumona & Stephen Nnaemeka Azom, "Politics of Identity and the Crisis of Nation-Building in Africa," retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ikenna (accessed 29/06/2024).
[106] Joseph Karbowski, "Chapter 11 - Political Animals and Human Nature in Aristotle's Politics from Part IV - Aristotle's Political Anthropology," retrieved from https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/aristotles-anthropology/political-animals-and-human-nature-in-aristotles-politics/FCF3EEAA6F00FDCB6493101028882C17 (accessed 29/06/2024).

Politics, as defined by David Easton, is "the activity through which people *collectively* make, preserve and amend general rules under which they live."[107] However, in Kenya, the political animosity and ethnic violence witnessed across the country are largely driven by identity politics, which, according to Alumona and Azom, is "derived from the activities of individuals or groups who try to whip up identity sentiments in the struggle for the authoritative allocation and distribution of the scarce resources of the state."[108] While identity politics can foster representation, it also destabilizes societies by fueling ethnic divisions and insecurity. In different parts of Africa, the fallout of identity politics has led to division, causing bloodshed in countries such as Rwanda, Nigeria, Liberia, and Somalia, apartheid in South Africa, and frequent ethnic violence in Kenya. This kind of politics has been a contributing factor of division among some tribes in Kenya. It fosters exclusion, violating the principle of equity and deepening social inequalities, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and youth.

Jonathan Sacks warns that "…politics of division turns into politics of grievances and competitive victimhood. This creates a malicious circle of social divisions leading to divisive politics that deepen and harden social divisions. It is one of the causes of the 'Us-versus-Them' mentality,"[109] a concerning precursor to democratic instability. Tip O'Neill's assertion that "All politics is local,"[110] underscores the role of grassroots activism in shaping governance. Yet, contemporary political leadership often prioritizes ethnic identities for political gain, eroding social cohesion and exacerbating challenges faced by youth, including unemployment and moral relativism. Politics that does not promote better citizenship affect every aspect of life. When politicians exploit ethnic identities for political gain, it leads to luck of trust, tension and conflicts within communities, fostering division rather than unity. The reoccurring insecurity tensions is due to ethnic identity politics and youth mostly are the affected people.

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[107] David Easton, "What is Politics?" Retrieved from www.macmillanihe.com › 9780230363373_sample (accessed on 20/04/2021).

[108] Ikenna Mike Alumona & Stephen Nnaemeka Azom, "Politics of Identity and the Crisis of Nation-Building in Africa."

[109] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 130.

[110] Political Science Guru, "The Saying All Politics is Local" Roughly Means: Unveiling the True Influence," retrieved from https://politicalscienceguru.com/the-saying-all-politics-is-local-roughly-means/ (accessed 22/06/2024). "The phrase "all politics is local" is commonly used in United States politics. Variations of the phrase date back to 1932. Tip O'Neill, is a former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Felix Bethke describes politics of division as a "divide-and-rule" strategy for political survival,"[111] a reality reflected in Kenya's historical ethnic and political tensions. Elections frequently intensify these divisions, as politicians manipulate ethnic sentiments, mobilize youth for political unrest, and deepen polarization. The persistent unemployment crisis in Kilifi County further exacerbates social instability, undermining the financial autonomy and dignity of young people. Additionally, identity-based exclusion fosters ethnocentrism, restricting job opportunities and reinforcing socio-economic disparities. Bethke's perspective aligns with Kenya's ongoing challenges, where inter-tribal conflicts stem from political fragmentation. Politicians exploit ethnic identities for personal and electoral gain, fueling distrust and insecurity. Tip O'Neill's assertion that "All politics is local" underscores the significance of grassroots concerns such as education, infrastructure, and public safety in shaping broader political movements. Politics of division has fueled ethnocentrism, affecting youth morality by fostering bias in employment and social interactions. This exclusion reinforces inequality, making it harder to uphold ethical values and counter relativism.

2.3.6 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism, a deeply ingrained cultural bias, shapes perceptions and interactions within diverse societies. Kilifi County, a multicultural region, reflects both the richness of cultural diversity and the tensions arising from ethnocentric attitudes. Elizabeth Baylor defines ethnocentrism as "a term applied to the cultural or ethnic bias, whether conscious or unconscious, in which an individual views the world from the perspective own group, establishing the in-group as model and rating all other groups with reference to this ideal."[112] This phenomenon is evident among the Midzi-Chenda, where youth often perceive their ethnic identity as superior, Among the Midzi-Chenda, youth often perceive their ethnic identity as superior, influencing their interactions with outsiders. Ethnocentrism has contributed to social divisions, exclusion, and unemployment among the youth. Scott Barr notes that "the belief that one's own culture and views are superior to others and should serve as the standard frame of

[111] Felix Bethke, "The Consequences of Divide-and-Rule Politics in Africa South of the Sahara," retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272549484_The_Consequences_of_Divide-and_Rule_Politics- (accessed 16/06/2024).
[112] Elizabeth Baylor, "Ethnocentrism," retrieved from https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0045.xml (accessed 20/04/2024).

reference is moral relativism."[113] This exclusionary mindset is evident in Mombasa and Kilifi, where attacks often target individuals from upcountry or foreign backgrounds. Karisa Kazungu, a pastoral agent, explains:

> Ethnically grouped youth are vulnerable to social vices, including political violence, extremism, drug abuse, and superstition. This vulnerability has fueled witchcraft accusations, leading to the brutal killings of elderly people. The alarming trend of elder killings reveals underlying socio-economic challenges such as poverty, land disputes, and historical injustices. Greedy relatives exploit superstitions, framing land disputes as witchcraft accusations to dispossess elders of family property.[114]

Violence against grey-haired men and women is a threat against human life and prejudice against the elderly. Joseph Masha, a journalist, recounts the plight of Mzee Kahindi Ngoka, a 69-year-old man from Dera village in Kilifi County. Kahindi finds no joy in his years since he lives in an area where being 'old' is a curse. In this community, elderly men and women are more likely to be killed than cared for. Ngoka's story exemplifies this grim reality. He is forced to flee his home after his sons conspired against him, falsely accusing him of practicing witchcraft.[115] In many African societies, elders are respected and cared for, but in Kilifi, the opposite is happening. Idleness among youth exacerbates immorality, leaving them susceptible to manipulation by politicians. Erik Meinema observes that "political leaders often manage to attract youth only by distributing food and money in their rallies and meetings, arguing that youth "think with their stomachs and pockets"[116] and participate in activities only when their material needs are met.

Political instability in coastal Kenya is closely tied to ethnocentrism, reinforcing an in-group versus out-group mentality that fuels exclusion and moral relativism. Jasper Edward Nyaura defines ethnicity as "all those aspects associated with a culturally constructed group

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[113]Scott Barr, "Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism," retrieved from https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Courses/Lumen_Learning/Introduction_to_Sociology_(Culture/6.08%3A_Ethnocentrism_and_Cultural_Relativism (accessed 17/06/2024).

[114] Karisa Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 17/01/2024.

[115] Joseph Masha, "7 Kenyan Journalists who were killed on the Job," retrieved from https://owaahh.com/7-kenyan-journalists-killed-job/ (accessed 30/06/2024). Masha was among the 7 journalists who were killed because of revealing the truth about the killing of the elderly in Kilifi County.

[116] Erik Meinema, "'Idle Minds' and 'Empty Stomachs': Youth, Violence and Religious Diversity in Coastal Kenya," retrieved from https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/africa/article/idle-minds-and-empty-stomachs-youth-violence-and-religious-diversity-in-coastal-kenya/C77B28DB03749D1FD349FC5B2DB324F0 (accessed 30/06/2024).

identity people who share common characteristics such as ancestry, language, history, society, culture or nation."[117] Ethnicity, when embraced positively, connects individuals to a larger community and provides a sense of belonging. Ethnicity in itself does not connote a negative attitude but God's gift that make us different for mutual enrichment. Ethnicity and culture are intertwined but distinct concepts. While ethnicity relates to shared ancestry lineage, culture encompasses broader aspects like language, customs, and traditions. Ethnicity identifies us and plays a significant role in shaping our social and cultural identity. However, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen argues that "every individual is a meeting ground for many different allegiances, and sometimes these loyalties conflict with one another and confront the person who harbors them with difficult choices."[118] Understanding the interplay of ethnicity and culture can enrich collective identity rather than deepen divisions.

Ethnocentrism significantly impacts the youth in Kilifi Deanery, shaping their social interactions and perspectives. The belief in ethnic superiority fosters exclusion, limiting opportunities for education, employment, and broader social integration. This leads to heightened intergroup tensions, political manipulation, and moral relativism, where young people struggle to make ethical decisions amid societal biases. Amartya Sen highlights how conflicting allegiances can create difficult choices, and in Kilifi, the pressures of identity and exclusion affect the youth's ability to navigate these challenges. As they grow within this divided environment, their worldview is influenced by the dominance of ethnic affiliations, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and marginalization that affect their social and economic prospects.

2.3.7 Poor Leadership and Its Consequences on Youth

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral compass of society, particularly influencing the ethical development of young people. Kimani Njogu defines leadership as "the

[117] Jasper Edward Nyaura, "Devolved Ethnicity in Kenya: Social, Economic and Political Perspective", retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326946643_Devolved_Ethnicity_in_the_Kenya_Social_Economic_and_Political_Perspective (accessed 18/06/2024).

[118] Amartya Sen is an Indian economist and philosopher. He has made a significant contributions to welfare economics. He received the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his work in this field. His research spans various areas, including social choice theory and social justice, economic theories of famines, decision theory. Sen is renowned for developing more sophisticated measures of poverty and for his insights into the causes and prevention of famines in India. His influential work has had a lasting impact on our understanding of well-being and social inequality.

process in which an individual or individuals influence others to achieve a common goal."[119] Leadership highlights its impact beyond formal authority to include families, communities, religious institutions, and government. Ethical leadership fosters integrity, while poor leadership marked by corruption and self-interest erodes social values, leading to disappointment and moral ambiguity. Douglas R. Satterfield emphasizes that "Leaders impact on shaping character… A great leader teaches, mentors, and coaches,"[120] whereas ineffective leadership fosters moral relativism, making ethical principles subjective and easily compromised. When leaders prioritize personal gain over collective well-being, young people are profoundly affected, influencing their worldview, decision-making, and engagement with societal norms. The discussion now examines how leadership at various levels contributes to moral relativism among the youth.

2.3.7.1 Family Leadership

Family leadership is the cornerstone of moral and social development, shaping values and guiding youth toward ethical decision-making. Parents make God real to young people. A child's learning and socialization is mostly influenced by their families since the family is the child's primary social group. It is for this reason that Vatican Council II describes the family as "a school for a richer humanity,"[121] emphasizing its role in transmitting moral and anthropological values. However, families in Kilifi County face significant socio-economic challenges, with divorce emerging as a major threat. The Catechism of the Catholic Church warns that "Divorce is immoral and a grave offense against nature. It goes against the original intention of marriage, which is meant to be indissoluble… Its effects introduces disorder into families and society, causing grave harm to the deserted spouse and traumatizes children caught between their parents."[122] Divorce has far-reaching consequences, making it a significant societal challenge. The coastal region, renowned for its tourism, experiences a notably high rate of divorce. In our field study, John Muge, a pastoral agent, observed:

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[119] Kimani Njogu, *Good Governance and Development: Towards Quality Leadership in Kenya* (Nairobi: Twaweza Communications, 2007), 8.
[120] Douglas R. Satterfield, "The Importance of Morality in Leadership", retrieved from https://www.theleadermaker.com/the-importance-of-morality-in-leadership/ (accessed 30/06/2024).
[121] Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (7th December, 1965), no. 52.
[122] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2001), no. 2385.

> Divorce is becoming a daily basis issue in Kilifi deanery. Broken families rate between 50-60 % and those that are already divorced ranges from 40-50 %. He continued that, one of the reason for this high rate of divorce is unfaithfulness and greedy for money and wealth. He argued that, some of the male tourists who visit coastal region want to go back to their countries with African women. The tourists requests a 'beach trader' to find them Kenyan women whom they would wish to marry. In most cases, greed for money compels the beach attendants to ask their wives to be married by the tourists but schemes with their wives that they would later divorce the male tourist after getting rich and live again like couples.[123]

This cycle of instability has led to increased extramarital affairs, weakening family structures and fostering moral relativism among youth, who emulate these behaviours. These are normal practices among many families in Kilifi deanery even for those who are wedded in the Church. This is a causative factor of high divorce rates in Kilifi deanery. Most of the women after marrying the tourists never come back again to their husbands. The divorced men end up having *mpango wa kando* ('a side dish' or 'extra marital affairs'). This has been a causative factor of divorce and moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi deanery since they also follow the examples of their parents.

Brian Otieno observes that "counties in the coastal region are becoming divorce counties..."[124] with youth delinquency rising due to family instability. Due to unfaithfulness, young people witness parental conflicts and infidelity. These issues impact the children's emotional well-being, weakening their relationships their parents. The increasing cohabitation lifestyle among the families in Kilifi deanery have made young people to have a depreciative attitude with regard to marriage. Many families no longer believe in the joy of true love and faithfulness in marriage. Mary Kadzo, a youth moderator, notes that "cohabitation has diminished commitment to marital values, leading to a surge in teenage pregnancies and single motherhood in Kilifi deanery."[125] *A Faith to Action Network* study reveals that, one in four teenage girls in Kilifi County is either pregnant or a mother, with hotspots in Ganze, Magarini, and Mtwapa. The absence of parental guidance further exposes youth to social vulnerabilities,

[123] A Church Moderator, interviewed by the researcher, at Kilifi, 15/02/2024.
[124] Brian Otieno, "Juvenile crime in Mombasa linked to high divorce rate," retrieved from https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2024-05-03-juvenile-crime-in-mombasa-linked-to-high-divorce-rate/ (accessed 19/06/2024).
[125] Mary Kadzo, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 17/01/2024.

reinforcing patterns of instability.[126] The high rate of teenage pregnancies in Kilifi County is alarming. Broken families and lack of parental guidance expose the youth to all kinds of vulnerability. Pope Francis warns that "situations of family breakdown sometimes even lead families to sell their children for prostitution,"[127] illustrating the risks faced by those from disrupted homes.

Family instability fosters emotional distress and disengagement among youth, with some adopting extremist ideologies or a reckless approach to life. Divorce is a serious issue in Kilifi deanery affecting the moral formation of the youth. Many young people today lack parental guidance due to divorce. Some grow up with bitterness against their parents especially those from single families. Constance Bansikiza: "… parents are forgetting that, the foundation of all the traits of a child is laid by the family environment,"[128] underscoring the impact of parental influence on moral development. The Code of Canon Law affirms that "Parents have the most grave duty and the primary right to take care as the best as they can for the physical, social, cultural, moral and religious education of their offspring."[129] In this framework, curbing moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi deanery, means working towards bringing sanity in the families. René Bureau writes "The future of the family life calls us to do something about it and think back to the discipline connected with the traditional methods of educating children."[130] Parental responsibility is primary in mitigating moral relativism among the youth. Parents need to know their irreplaceable duties to their children in order to school them to cultivate behavior that earn them respect and gratefulness in the society. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta stresses that "boys and girls, in the process of growing up, are to realize that they have only one thing to learn which sum up all others: "manners and deportment proper to their station in the community."[131] While challenges persist, the family remains central to youth moral formation, shaping their values, identity, and engagement with broader societal norms.

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[126] Faith to Action Network, "Alarming-state-of-teenage-pregnancies-in-kilifi," retrieved from https://faithtoactionetwork.org/2017/03/30/faith-to-action-network-report-reveals-alarming-state-of-teenage-pregnancies-in-kilifi/ (accessed 20/06/2024).

[127] Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia,* On the Joy of Love (19 March, 2016), no. 46.

[128] Constance Bansikiza, "Challenges Facing the Christian Families in Africa," in *Search for New Paradigms for Evangelization in the 21st Century*, (ed.), John Lukwata (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2013), 133-154, 149.

[129] *Code of the Canon Law* (Britain: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), no. 1136.

[130] René Bureau, *Anthropologies, Religions Africaines et Christianisme* (Peris: Moran Publishers, 2002), 71.

[131] Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (Nairobi: East Africa Publishers Ltd, 1938), 72.

2.3.7.2 Church Leadership and Moral Formation

The family and the Church play a fundamental role in shaping young people's moral development. Families pass on values and faith, while the Church strengthens Christian principles, guiding individuals toward discipleship. As Pope Francis asserts, "the Church which 'goes forth' is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice."[132] Pope Francis underscores the Church's mission to transcend its comfort zones, actively reaching out to those in need, sharing the faith with sincerity, and addressing real-world challenges with compassion and commitment. As a supportive community, the Church nurtures and sustains its members in their faith journey. Pope John XXIII affirms that "the Church is 'Mother and Teacher of all nations.'"[133] As a mother, the Church provides spiritual nourishment, guidance, and pastoral care. As a teacher, it imparts moral instruction through evangelization, shaping believers in matters of faith, ethics, and the path to salvation. Through both roles, the Church remains a vital force in fostering spiritual growth and moral integrity within society.

Pope Paul VI emphasizes that "The Church exists in order to evangelize,"[134] both those who have not yet heard about Christ and those whose faith has grown cold toward a deeper relationship with God, their Ultimate End. In this context, the Church serves as the conscience of society, imparting moral instruction and spiritual nourishment. Henry Peschke defines conscience as "the voice of God in the heart of every person… inner sanctuary in which we listen to the voice of God."[135] In this role, the Church confronts moral relativism, urging individuals to pursue holiness, embrace righteousness, and consistently choose good over evil. Rodrigo Meja, in his compilation of the social teaching of the Catholic Bishops of Kenya, reports that during the *AMECEA* Plenary Meeting in Nairobi in July 1976, Kenya's President Jomo Kenyatta affirmed the Church's role in the political order. Addressing the Catholic Bishops of Eastern Africa, he declared: "The Church is the conscience of society, and today a society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we go wrong and you keep quiet, one day you may

[132] Francis, Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium,* On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), no. 24.
[133] John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (May, 15, 1961): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 53 (1961), 401-464, no. 1.
[134] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Evangelization in the Modern World (December, 8, 1975): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68, (1976), no.14.
[135] Henry Peschke, *Christian Ethics: General Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican Council II* (Dublin: Goodlife Neale, 1977), 147.

have to answer for your mistakes."[136]It seems that, the founder of the nation was pointing out the strategic position the Church should take in the society in addressing all issues concerning faith and morality.

Jomo Kenyatta's remarks highlight the Church's vital influence in society, emphasizing its duty to uphold moral integrity and promote ethical governance. By describing the Church as the conscience of the nation, he affirmed its responsibility to challenge injustices, advocate for the marginalized, and provide clear moral direction. His call for the Church to speak boldly against wrongdoing highlights its duty to promote truth and justice. The Church must actively guide individuals, addressing moral and ethical concerns in society. Its voice should remain steadfast in advocating for righteousness, particularly in matters of governance and morality. This insight is particularly relevant in Kilifi Deanery, where moral relativism among youth presents a significant challenge. In a society where subjective ethics often dominate, the Church must provide a solid foundation of principles, helping young people discern right from wrong amidst conflicting influences. Kenyatta's reminder that silence in the face of wrongdoing makes one accountable reinforces the importance of moral leadership, urging the Church to take an active stance in shaping ethical perspectives.

Stan Chu Ilo emphasizes that "The Church's mission is to illuminate lives through both words and deeds…"[137] To counter relativism, pastoral leaders must reassess strategies, listening to families and youth to address contemporary challenges. The Synod of Bishops stresses parish involvement, stating that "The parish has to be involved in this process, as it seeks to become a more generative community, an environment which spearheads the mission…[138] The Synod emphasize that parish involvement is essential in ensuring that the Gospel is not only taught but also lived out authentically. It calls the parish to be a generative community, one that actively fosters and leads the mission of evangelization. Authentic Christian witness is crucial, as Pope Paul VI observes, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witness."[139] Personal testimonies and mentorship can inspire

[136] Rodrigo Mejia, *The Conscience of Society: 1960-1995* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1995), 50.
[137] Stan Chu Ilo "The Church of the Future in Africa: A Path to the Praxis of Pope Francis's Illuminative Ecclesiology in African Catholicism," retrieved from https://concilium-vatican2.org/ilo/ (accessed 06/07/2024).
[138] Synod of Bishops, XV Ordinary General Assembly: *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, Final Document* (27 October, 2018), no. 129.
[139] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41.

youth to embrace truth over relativism. Addressing issues such as social justice, mental health, and career struggles within a faith-based framework enhances the relevance of Christianity in daily life.

In this understanding, catechesis rooted in genuine relationships ensures moral formation remain culturally resonant rather than just words. This underscores the need for conversational catechesis, which prioritizes authentic relationships and encounters, ensuring that moral formation resonates with African traditional values. Pope John Paul II further emphasized the importance of localized catechisms, stating that "This catechism… is meant to encourage and assist in the writing of new local catechisms, which must take into account various situations and cultures, while carefully preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic doctrine."[140] The influence of globalization, media, and peer dynamics often confuses young people's moral compass. A catechist in Kikambala parish observes that "youth struggle with questions of identity, navigating the tension between local heritage and external influences. Their moral compass is often shaped by peer pressure, education, media, and foreign cultural narratives, leading to confusion and displacement."[141] This uncertainty weakens commitment to faith-based teachings, demanding that pastoral leaders strike a balance between doctrinal fidelity and contemporary relevance.

The decline in youth participation in Church activities further affects ethical decision-making and social responsibility, highlighting the urgent need for critical engagement by clergy, consecrated persons and catechists. Beyond individual faith formation, this trend threatens communal cohesion, requiring an in-depth understanding of cultural shifts to offer meaningful guidance. As relativism fosters ethical uncertainty, Church leadership must serve as an intellectual and moral anchor, ensuring that young people develop clarity, conviction, and a rooted sense of identity amid a rapidly evolving society.

2.3.7.3 Government Leadership in Shaping Youth Morality

Government leadership plays an integral role in shaping the ethical consciousness of young people. As the primary institution responsible for law, order, and social policies, governance

[140] John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, On the Publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church Prepared Following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), nos. 26 & 27.
[141] A Catechist, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 25/02/2024.

provides a framework for moral development, influencing the values that youth adopt. Pope John Paul II emphasized this connection, stating, “Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person.”[142] This statement underscores the necessity of a governance model rooted in an unwavering commitment to human dignity and moral truth, rather than one susceptible to subjective or fluctuating values. When leadership lacks a consistent ethical foundation, laws and principles risk being shaped by personal opinions or societal trends rather than universal moral truths creating instability within society. John Karisa further highlights the consequences of such governance, stating:

> The rise of moral relativism among young people is closely linked to leadership that does not uphold objective moral standards. When governance fails to promote justice, integrity, and accountability, youth are more likely to adopt a relativistic outlook, believing that morality is subjective and flexible. If leaders engage in corruption, nepotism, or favoritism, it reinforces the idea that ethical values are negotiable, weakening societal cohesion and moral development.[143]

John Paul II’s assertion also highlights the role of law in shaping moral character. A society governed by ethical legal structures helps cultivate virtue among citizens, particularly the youth. When laws are just, transparent, and serve the common good, they guide young people toward moral stability. However, when governance tolerates unethical behavior, moral relativism becomes more deeply ingrained, leading to issues such as dishonesty, substance abuse, and social unrest. Jonathan Sacks cautions against leadership that shifts from "We-consciousness" to "I-consciousness" in which we ask not what is best for me, but what is best for “all of us together.”[144] A leadership framework rooted in "We-consciousness" prioritizes the common good, fostering unity, mutual respect, and moral integrity. In contrast, "I-consciousness" reflects self-centered governance, where leaders prioritize personal gain, power, and self-interest over societal welfare. Political instability, protests, and economic distress have fueled political challenges in Kenya, reflecting deep-seated frustrations among citizens, particularly the youth.

[142] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, On the Hundreth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (1 May 1991): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83 (1991), 793-868, no. 46.
[143] John Karisa, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 26/02/2024.
[144] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, 36.

The vulnerabilities facing young people today contribute significantly to moral relativism, diminishing their prospects for constructive societal engagement. Richard Rwiza underscores that "bad leadership is a contributing factor,"[145] highlighting how governance failures erode ethical standards and social cohesion. Poor leadership structures, particularly in Kilifi County, have created conditions where youth empowerment remains neglected, further exacerbating political disillusionment and economic instability. As one pastoral agent observed, "One of the most profound consequences of ineffective leadership in Kilifi County is the failure to empower the youth, which exacerbates political disillusionment and economic instability."[146] This decline in ethical governance inevitably fosters politics of populism, as explained by Jonathan Sacks:

> Politics of populism is a form of politics that occurs when people see unacceptable gaps opening up in wealth and opportunity, when they sense assaults on their values either from an avant-garde or from outsiders, when they feel that the establishment elites are working against them, and not for them, and that the government is not addressing their problems. Societal freedom cannot be sustained by market economics and liberal democratic politics alone, we need a third element: morality, a concern for the welfare of others, an active commitment to justice and compassion, a willingness to ask not just what is good for me but what is good for all of us together.[147]

The rise of populist sentiment stems from widespread frustration with leadership that appears disconnected from the needs and aspirations of its people especially the young ones. Youth, who should be integral to governance and development, instead find themselves sidelined, lacking the necessary support systems to thrive. Harrison Ford observes that "There is new force of nature at hand stirring all over the world, they are the young people whom frankly we have failed, who are angry, who are organized, capable of making a difference, they are a moral world army and the most important thing that we can do for them is to get the hell out of their way."[148] Fords observation is a call for leaders, institutions, and society as a whole to recognize that young people are not just the future, they are the present. Their voices, actions, and leadership should be respected, supported, and given the space to bring meaningful change. It aligns with the idea that youth empowerment is essential for sustainable progress in governance and society.

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[145] Richard Rwiza, "On the Social Question of Workers: An Analysis of *Rerum Novarum* and Its Application to the Contemporary Situation of Africa," in *Africa Christian Studies* 30, no.1 (2014): 22-44.
[146] A pastoral agent, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 29/01/2024.
[147] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the common good in divided times*, 19 & 16.
[148] A message of Harrison Ford giving a pro-Palestinian speech during the Israel-Hamas war On April 20, 2024.This was retrieved form https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/harrison-ford-palestine-speech (accessed 24/06/2024).

Without structures that encourage their participation, they become susceptible to moral relativism, adopting an increasingly individualistic or cynical approach toward societal values. This disconnect between leadership and youth is evident in Kenya, where the Gen Z uprising revealed deep-rooted discontent towards government leadership. The protests underscored the growing impatience of young people with economic hardship, unemployment, corruption, and poor governance. With inadequate leadership structures, moral integrity is compromised, and the youth suffer the consequences experiencing a lack of meaningful opportunities, exposure to social vices, and ideological radicalization leading to relativism as an alternative. As Benjamin Disraeli that, "The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity." … A nation's future promise is directly tied to the prospects of its youth."[149] The insightful message of these scholars remain relevant and true for the Kenyan government leadership, particularly in Kilifi County. Jonathan Sacks clearly states: "A government in which representatives publicly contradict one another will be a disgrace. A soccer team of the most brilliant players in the world will not succeed if each acts like a diva… A political party in which each member publicly delivers his or her judgment as to what policy should be will be shambles."[150]

Leadership that models ethical responsibility fosters a generation that values justice and integrity, while governance that tolerates moral compromise weakens societal foundations. The absence of transparent and just policies has led to survivalist attitudes, where young people navigate moral ambiguity with little institutional support. Corruption, favoritism, and neglect have further deepened this crisis, fostering moral relativism and disengagement. The frustration among the youth, evident in Kenya's *Gen Z* uprising, highlights the urgent need for leadership that prioritizes justice and accountability. Without a governance framework that empowers youth and upholds ethical standards, moral uncertainty will persist, undermining their potential for constructive societal transformation. A leadership model rooted in integrity and inclusivity is essential for restoring trust, strengthening moral resilience, and ensuring a future built on ethical responsibility within Kilifi Deanery.

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[149] John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on the Nation's Youth," retrieved from https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-the-nations-youth (accessed 24/07/2024). John F. Kennedy 35th President of the United States: 1961 - 1963, quoting the message of Benjamin Disraeli to the youth during the congress in the United States calling the nation to promote and protect the interests of our younger citizens.

[150] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, 36.

2.4 The Impact of Moral Relativism on the Youth

Moral relativism has significantly shaped youth perspectives, influencing their values and ethical decision-making. In Kilifi County, young people face challenges such as ideological radicalization, individualism, secularism, materialism, tribalism, corruption, and the decline of African traditional moral values. These issues weaken moral stability, creating uncertainty in personal and societal responsibilities. To understand the depth of this impact, the discussion will explore key dimensions such as youth ideological radicalization, individualism, secularism, materialism, tribalism, corruption, and the decline of African traditional values, analyzing their effects on the youth and their broader implications for society.

2.4.1 Youth Ideological Radicalization

Youth radicalization has long been a concern in the coastal region, where historical injustices and socio-political exclusion have fueled extremist narratives, ultimately escalating into violent extremism. Alana Siegel defines radicalization as "the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence as a method to effect societal change."[151] This transformation is often driven by deep-seated grievances, including land dispossession, unemployment, and political exclusion, which push individuals toward radical ideologies as a form of resistance. According to John Karisa, "youth radicalization in the coastal area can be traced back to political reforms of the 1990s, when coastal communities became increasingly aware of their exclusion from national development."[152] This realization, rooted in systemic neglect and historical injustices, intensified frustrations, making radical narratives more appealing to young people seeking political, economic, and social change. According to Karisa, the phrase "rooted in systemic neglect and historical injustices" refers to:

> The longstanding marginalization of coastal communities, where successive governments failed to prioritize development, leaving them economically and socially disadvantaged. This neglect includes limited access to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. Additionally, historical injustices such as colonial-era land dispossession and post-independence policies favoring certain regions deepened the exclusion, leading to unresolved land disputes. These factors contributed to frustration

[151] Alana Siegel, Youth Radicalization: Interventions and Challenges for Prevention," retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332344455_Youth_Radicalization_Interventions_and_Challenges_for_Prevention (accessed 20/08/2024).
[152] John Karisa, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kazengo village, Kikambala, 25/02/2025.

> and a sense of abandonment, making radical ideologies more appealing to young people seeking political, economic, and social change.[153]

Katana Juma, a village elder, explains that "many locals in Kilifi County lack title deeds, a situation rooted in colonial-era land dispossession and post-independence policies that did not adequately address ownership disputes."[154] This unresolved land crisis has led to forced evictions, economic distress, and social tensions, further exacerbating radicalization. Juma further elaborates that "Radicalized youth groups have exploited these grievances by portraying their movements as defending ancestral land from outsiders, whom they perceive as economic oppressors."[155] The Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) has capitalized on these sentiments, using its slogan *Pwani si Kenya* (Mombasa is not Kenya) to deepen divisions between residents, authorities, and those labeled as 'upcountry people.' Juma explains that "During election periods, MRC activities often intensify, causing insecurity and fueling ideological extremism."[156]Additionally, factors such as youth unemployment contribute to radicalization. The inability to achieve financial autonomy impacts their dignity, leaving them vulnerable to ideological radicalization and peer pressure.

According to the Kenya Community Support Centre, violent extremism in Kilifi is nurtured by unresolved conflicts, human rights violations, ethnic discrimination, political exclusion, and socio-economic marginalization.[157] This environment fosters hate crimes and obstructs peaceful relations, prompting government investigations and the deportation of foreign clerics suspected of spreading extremist ideologies. The National Council of Churches of Kenya warns of the devastating effects of radicalization, stating that it has led to the collapse of businesses and the decline of tourism, negatively impacting Kilifi's economy..."[158] Mary Masha adds that "economic challenges have made many young people susceptible to extremist ideologies and recruitment. Land disputes have fueled inter-generational conflicts, including the killing of the elderly under accusations of witchcraft, though the real motive is land

[153] John Karisa, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kazengo village, 25/02/2025.
[154] Katana Juma, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 24/02/2024.
[155] Katana Juma, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 24/02/2024.
[156] John Juma, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 24/02/2024.
[157] Kenya Community Support Centre, "Kilifi County Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," retrieved from https://kecosce.org/kilifi-county-action-plan-for-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism/ (accessed 08/07/2024).
[158] National Council of Churches of Kenya, "Changing Fortunes in Kilifi County as Religious Leaders Engage Youths," retrieved from http://www.ncck.org/changing-fortunes-in-kilifi-county-as-religious-leaders-engage-youths/ (accessed 08/07/2024).

ownership."[159] However, a significant challenge remains the reluctance of many youths to engage in self-employment, as high illiteracy rates limit their options. This analysis underscores the complex interplay between historical grievances, land disputes, economic marginalization, ethnic tensions, and ideological radicalization in Kilifi County.

2.4.2 Individualism and Ethical Shifts among the Youth

In Kilifi County, traditional communal values are increasingly giving way to individualistic perspectives, altering how young people define their roles in society. As economic pressures, cultural transformations, and evolving ethical beliefs take hold, youth are prioritizing personal ambitions over collective responsibilities. Jane Kadzo notes that "As traditional communal norms decline, many youth prioritize personal interests over collective responsibilities,"[160] illustrating the profound shift in social dynamics. Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw describe individualism as "an attitude of going it alone; an attitude that is opposed to community team spirit which works on the basis of common commitment."[161] This mindset, which favours self-reliance at the expense of shared responsibility, poses profound implications for communal cohesion. While individualism fosters autonomy and personal growth, it can also lead to isolation and a weakening of social solidarity. In Kilifi, where communal living has historically been central to societal organization, the increasing embrace of individualism, often influenced by moral relativism and modernity, raises critical concerns about the future of the community social cohesion and cultural identity.

Samuel Bedijo further elaborates on the notion of individualism, depicting it as "a dissociating of oneself from others. It is cold and repulsive towards communal life. This has been explained as an antithesis or resistance to solidarity. Solidarity has been explained as: standing together, joining hands, supporting one another, common strength, sharing of resources. Intensely understood, individualism poses a radical moral problem which goes to the heart of community life."[162] If taken to an extreme, it can erode the collective bonds that provide social stability, thereby destabilizing communal values. Bedijo's perspective suggests that excessive

[159] Mary Masha, interviewed by the researcher, at Majengo, Kikambala, 23/01/2024.
[160] Jane Kadzo, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kazengo, Kikambala, 23/02/2024.
[161] Germain GRISEZ & Russell Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ: A Summary of Christian Moral Principles* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 88 & 62.
[162] Samuel Bedijo, *The Moral Problem Posed by Individualism in the Church in Africa: A Case Study in Nebbi Catholic Diocese in North-Western Uganda* (EOS Verlag Sankt Ottilien, 2013), 93.

individualism fundamentally challenges the principles of solidarity, which is built upon unity, mutual support, and shared resources. This dynamic raises the concern that the pursuit of personal autonomy may ultimately weaken communal relationships, necessitating a reflection on how societies can balance individual freedom with the imperative for solidarity.

Thomas F. Schindler validates this view, stating that "individualism is a loosening of the individual-community connection."[163] This definition underscores the relationship between individualism and communal life, emphasizing that individualism disposes people toward isolation. It reflects a willful attitude that prioritizes individual liberty over legitimate institutions that regulate communal life. Samuel Bedijo advances this argument further by defining individualism as "a falsification of freedom, and the truth of being human,"[164] implying that it leads to the erosion of communal values that bind people together. Pietro Palazzini supports this perspective, writing that "Individualism extols the value of the individual, liberty against authority … It is based on the principles that a person is sufficient and responsible only to himself (autonomy). One's own conscience is the only criterion of good or evil."[165] Roger L. Shinn similarly notes that "The individual glories in freedom and autonomy. He has little interest in tradition, social solidarity and authority."[166] These arguments illustrate how individualism, when unchecked, contradicts African communal perspectives, which emphasize that achievement is a product of collective effort rather than solitary pursuit.

From a societal standpoint, individualism challenges the very fabric of social existence. Human communities, by their nature, do not operate on isolation; rather, they thrive on interconnectedness and shared values. John Mbiti reinforces this notion by remarking that

> Values and morals safeguard and uphold the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the world around them. They cover topics like truth, justice, love, right and wrong, good and evil, beauty, decency, respect for people and property, the keeping of promises and agreements, praise and blame, crime and punishment, the rights and responsibilities of both the individual and his community, character, integrity…[167]

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[163] Thomas F. Schindler, *Ethics: Social Dimension-Individualism and Catholic Tradition* (Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1989), 45.
[164] Samuel Bedijo, *The Moral Problem Posed by Individualism in the Church in Africa: A Case Study in Nebbi Catholic Diocese in North-Western Uganda* (EOS Verlag Sankt Ottilien, 2013), 119.
[165] Pietro Palazzini (ed.), *Dictionary of Moral Theology* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1963), 619.
[166] Roger L. Shinn, "Individualism," in *Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (ed.), John Macquarrie (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1967), 164-165.
[167] John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion, 2nd ed., Reprint* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2003), 12.

In Kilifi Deanery, the rise of individualism among the youth has been exacerbated by various social and economic factors. The Midzi-Chenda community, known for its strong shared norms and values, has witnessed a weakening of social bonds due to recurring insecurity and the erosion of traditional moral principles. This shift has led to significant ethical dilemmas among young people, particularly in Kilifi County. Western influences, especially in Mtwapa town, commonly referred to as "Sin City," have dramatically impacted youth morality. Eda Asha provides a striking depiction of Mtwapa, stating:

> Mtwapa town is known for its vibrant nightlife. Along the main road, bars and restaurants attract both locals and tourists. Young girls hang out there, half naked hoping to meet wealthy Western men and locals. Many of them are school drop outs. Some of the youth do not want to work but want to get money through short cuts. Relativistic culture promiscuity and other illicit behaviours are becoming the ultimate *telos* that one ought to strive for. Young people view such activities as morally acceptable, as long as they get money. The kind of lifestyle practiced there clashes completely with the collective African moral principles.[168]

This shift in values illustrates the broader challenges posed by individualism. Through a field study conducted among various groups including village elders, the Catholic Men and Women Associations, religious women, teachers, and catechists, several concerns emerged. These groups perceived youth as individuals who have lost their cultural identity and social fabric due to Western influence. Many expressed concerns that young people increasingly resist correction, guidance, and obedience to parental and community norms.[169] The growing resistance has led to a breakdown in traditional authority, increased moral and ethical dilemmas, weakened social cohesion, rising insecurity, materialistic tendencies, reduced intergenerational dialogue, and an erosion of cultural identity, all consequences of the deepening influence of individualism. As Schindler observes, “Individualism is loosening of the community connection,”[170] leading to secularism and materialism, both of which pose threats to traditional communal structures.

2.4.3 The Influence of Secularism on Youth Moral Values

In Kilifi County, secularism is reshaping the moral life of the youth as moral relativism weakens traditional ethical structures. With declining influence of religious and communal values, personal autonomy takes precedence, leading to a shift where individual choices override

[168] Eda Asha, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 20/01/2024.
[169] Mwenda Hamisi, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 20/01/2024.
[170] Thomas F. Schindler, *Ethics: Social Dimension-Individualism and Catholic Tradition* (Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1989), 45.

collective moral responsibility. This transformation challenges longstanding principles of social cohesion, fostering a culture where subjective morality dictates behaviour, often at the expense of shared ethical standards. Understanding the impact of secularism in this context is essential to addressing its implications for identity, community values, and the moral future of Kilifi's youth. Etymologically, secularism comes from a Latin word *saecularis,* which means worldly or temporal affairs such as civil and daily affairs.[171] This brings us to a definitional understanding of the term secularism itself. According to Aylward Shorter secularism is defined as "a situation in which religious faith, for one reason or another is felt to be unnecessary. A state in which religion loses its hold both at the level of social institutions and at the level of human consciousness. Secularism denies the immanence of God."[172] Secularism remains a significant force in contemporary society. While religion continues to influence various cultures, as John Muya noted "the separation of faith from public affairs and personal consciousness has become more pronounced,"[173] particularly among the youth in urban and globalized settings. Midzi-Chenda culture, African way of life is embraced in totality in all its forms and thoughts as reflected by John Mbiti in his book, *African Religions and Philosophy*:

> Africans are notoriously religious. This implies that, an individual is born religiously in a religious setting and grew up as a religious person able to distinguish between what is sacred and secular. So, religion permeated the entire department of human life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony: if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university, if he is a politician, he take it to the house of parliament.[174]

Mbiti's statement highlights the deep and pervasive role of religion in African societies. He emphasizes that spirituality is not just a segment of life but is integrated into every aspect of existence including social, cultural, economic, and political. In traditional African thought, religious beliefs shape community values, identity, and daily interactions, with practices often revolving around ancestral veneration, rituals, and a strong connection to the divine. Mbiti underscores that for most African societies, religion is not a separate institution but a lived experience that informs moral conduct, decision-making, and the communal way of life. This

[171] George Holyoake, "History and Origin of Secularism," retrieved from https://nykdaily.com/2020/12/history-and-origin-of-secularism/ (accessed 20/07/2024.
[172] Aylward Shorter, *Secularism in Africa* (Nairobi: St. Paul Communications, 1997), 14.
[173] John Muya, interviewd by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 25/02/2024.
[174] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1 & 2.

perspective contrasts with secular worldviews, where religion may be viewed as a personal or private affair rather than a collective and integral force in societal organization. But in the contemporary society especially among young people, can we still affirm this idea that youth in Africa are notoriously religious as John Mbiti claimed?

Peter Ochieng' Okumu observes that, "we are living in a different reality and a different cultural context where values and ideologies are being borrowed and shared."[175] Okumu's statement highlights the evolving nature of youth identity and belief systems in Kilifi, where traditional religious devotion is increasingly challenged by globalization, digital influence, and cultural exchange. Kadze Katana further notes that "communal and religious values, once central to moral conduct, are increasingly overshadowed by secularism, individualism, and materialistic ideologies,"[176] reshaping ethical perspectives. The borrowing and integration of foreign ideologies have fostered a more fluid approach to morality and spirituality, with personal interpretation often taking precedence over communal expectations. While religion remains significant, John Mbiti's characterization of Africans as "notoriously religious" may no longer fully apply, particularly in urban centers like Mtwapa, where detachment from traditional moral structures is evident.

The rise of secularism among Kilifi's youth is evident in their shifting priorities, where entertainment and material pursuits often take precedence over religious devotion. John Katana explains that, "Urban influences, particularly in areas like Mtwapa, have contributed to the normalization of lifestyles that diverge from traditional ethical expectations, fostering detachment from communal values. Exposure to global secular ideologies through digital platforms has reinforced the perception that faith is outdated,"[177] leading many to abandon religious commitment. Pope John Paul II, in *Fides et Ratio*, asserts that "faith is not merely belief but an act of obedience to God,"[178] emphasizing that genuine faith requires trust and alignment with divine guidance. However, as secularism gains ground, this obedient response is weakened, resulting in a shift toward individualism and subjective morality. Cultural diversity enriches

[175] Peter Ochieng' Okumu, "Secularism: A Pastoral Challenge among the Contemporary African Youth," retrieved from https://repository.tangaza.ac.ke/items/2d649af4-71f7-4b38-93b9-2b336fbe0db6 (accessed 10/07/2024).
[176] Kadze Katana, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 26/02/2024.
[177] John Katana, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 26/02/2024.
[178] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio,* On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason, (September, 14, 1998): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 91 (1999), 5-88, no. 13.

Kilifi County, offering a rich and dynamic social landscape. However, it also challenges youth in maintaining religious commitments, fostering materialism and shifting their focus toward personal and economic aspirations over spiritual fulfillment.

2.4.4 Materialism and Its Effect on Youth Morality

Materialism has become one of the defining challenges of the 21st century, shaping individuals' pursuits and priorities around wealth, possessions, and power. Contemporary society places increasing emphasis on material wealth, social status, pleasure, and consumption. Klinger defines materialism as "an ideology that asserts that, every reality that exists is material, and besides the material reality, there is nothing that does exist. That means, there is no God, no soul, no spiritual reality, but only matter exists."[179] This perspective underscores the rise of secularism, where materialistic pursuits take precedence over spiritual and ethical considerations. Materialism among the youth in Kilifi County is influenced by several interrelated factors, including unemployment, nepotism, ideological radicalization, social pressure, consumerism, media influence, and the absence of alternative value systems. Eunice Njambi observes that, "the Coastal counties of Mombasa, Kwale, and Kilifi have witnessed increased ideological radicalization among the youth."[180] This suggests a link between materialism and radicalization, as individuals seeking wealth, status, and possessions may be vulnerable to extreme ideologies that promise financial or social gain.

A study by the Kenya Community Support Centre highlights the role of nepotism in limiting employment opportunities, stating that "in Kilifi Deanery, many educated and deserving individuals face challenges in securing employment due to nepotism within both public and private sectors."[181] The resulting frustration has driven many young people toward materialistic pursuits as a means of attaining autonomy and social recognition. Peer pressure exacerbates this dynamic, compelling individuals to acquire luxury goods, fashionable attire, and expensive gadgets to secure social approval. Social media further reinforces this trend, exposing youth to images of affluence and lavish lifestyles, intensifying aspirations for material success.

[179] Klinger Rimiru, *Philosophy, Science and God: Introduction to Theodicy* (Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy Press, 2000), 118.
[180] Eunice Njambi, *The Role of Ideology in Youth Radicalization: Mombasa, Kilifi and Kwale Counties* (Nairobi: International Peace Support Training Centre, 2017), 13.
[181] Kenya Community Support Centre, Kilifi County Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism -2022," retrieved from https://kecosce.org/kilifi-county-action-plan-for-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism/ (accessed 04/08/2024).

Materialism thrives when traditional African value systems weaken. Historically, African societies emphasized communal solidarity, as expressed by John Mbiti: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[182] However, this collective identity is being eroded by materialistic tendencies, shifting the focus from communal responsibility to individual survival.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu embodies the essence of human interconnectedness, mutual care, and communal responsibility. As articulated by Samkange S. and Samkange, Ubuntu emphasizes three core principles: "humanity, sanctity of life and people-centered status"[183] that prioritizes collective well-being over individual gain. Rooted in African traditions, Ubuntu reinforces the idea that a person's identity and success are fundamentally linked to their relationships and contributions within the community. However, materialism fosters individualism, diminishing the sense of community that has long been central to African social structures. Materialistic attitudes often reshape perceptions of morality, leading individuals to prioritize financial gain over ethical behavior. As Okumu observes, "God and religion are realities which are normally not part of their lives, but sought only when the other available means have been consulted…They are not totally excluded, but they are sought only as the last refuge."[184] This suggests that spirituality and religious values are increasingly relegated to secondary importance, reinforcing the dominance of material wealth as a measure of success. This highlights how many young people in Kilifi prioritize material gains over spiritual values, turning to religion only when all other options have failed.

2.4.5 Ethnicity as an Impact of Relativism among the Youth

Ethnicity is a fundamental aspect of identity, shaping social interactions and political affiliations. Traditionally rooted in shared ancestry, language, and cultural heritage, its interpretation has evolved under relativism, becoming a more fluid and subjective concept. Among the youth in Kilifi Deanery, this shift has led to exclusionary attitudes, ethnic biases, and social divisions, particularly when ethnicity is used as a tool for political and economic mobilization. To provide a precise understanding, it is essential to differentiate between ethnicity and tribalism. According to Enoch Appiah:

[182] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 108-109.
[183] Samkange, S. & Samkange, "Hunhuism or ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy," retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2023.2168638 (accessed 17/05/2024).
[184] Peter Ochieng' Okumu, "Secularism: A Pastoral Challenge among the Contemporary African Youth," retrieved from https://repository.tangaza.ac.ke/items/2d649af4-71f7-4b38-93b9-2b336fbe0db6 (accessed 10/07/2024).

> Ethnicity is simply a shared cultural identity that does not inherently involve exclusion or rivalry. It refers to the nature of social interactions between members of different ethnic groups within a diverse society, shaped by cultural awareness and communal ties. In contrast, tribalism as a deep-seated loyalty to one's own group, often accompanied by suspicion or hostility toward outsiders. A significant distinction between the two is that tribalism is often rooted in familial or blood relationships, whereas ethnicity is not necessarily based on kinship. Consequently, tribal members tend to have closer biological connections than individuals within an ethnic group.[185]

Within this framework, ethnicity defines social interactions in a pluralistic society, influenced by cultural awareness and communal affiliations. However, in Kilifi Deanery, the interpretation of ethnicity has resulted in ethnocentric biases, strained intergroup relations, and increased social polarization. One major consequence of this relativistic approach is the growing difficulty youth face in engaging with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly those outside the Midzi-Chenda community. Jones Dama, a counselor at a church-based health facility, notes: "The growing perception among young people that ethnicity determines the worth and trustworthiness of others has deeply affected their ability to build meaningful relationships beyond their own ethnic circles."[186] Another critical aspect of ethnicity in Kilifi Deanery is its connection to land ownership and territorial identity. Dama further explains that "many young people in Kilifi County perceive external communities as encroaching upon their ancestral land, reinforcing resistance against perceived intruders. Political rhetoric exacerbates these concerns, as leaders manipulate ethnic sentiments to mobilize support by pledging to reclaim land."[187] This fosters ethnic exclusivity and contributes to political and social tensions that hinder integration and peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, ethnicity has become an instrumental force in shaping the political landscape of Kilifi Deanery. Political actors often exploit ethnic loyalty to rally supporters, using divisive narratives that amplify fear and hostility. As Steve Patterson cautions: "this approach degrades civil discourse, perpetuates negative stereotypes, and diminishes mutual respect among different ethnic groups. The media further exacerbates these divisions, reinforcing prejudices through

[185] Enoch Appiah, What is the difference between tribalism and ethnicity? retrieved from https://differencedigest.com/lifestyleliving/life/what-is-the-difference-between-tribalism-and-ethnicity/ (accessed 15/06/2025).
[186] Jones Dama, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kadzengo, Kikambala, 22/02/2024.
[187] Jones Dama, interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kadzengo, Kikambala, 22/02/2024.

selective reporting and polarizing messages."[188] Beyond social and political implications, the impact of ethnicity extends to economic and developmental prospects. A pastoral agent, who requested anonymity, explained that, "majority of young people in Kilifi are school dropouts. This has limited them to job opportunities. When young people internalize ethnic biases, they limit their networking opportunities, employment choices, and access to innovation."[189] Consequently, ethnicity-driven exclusivity discourages collaboration, thereby impeding collective progress and reinforcing socioeconomic stagnation. Bill Sutherland and Matt Meyer advocate for a community-based spirit, emphasizing: "Neighborhood spirit highlights the essence of what it means to be human, it calls for empathy and unity. It reminds us that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be truly human together."[190] This quote emphasizes the importance of community and interconnectedness in human life. It suggests that true humanity is realized through empathy, unity, and mutual support, rather than isolation or division. By fostering strong communal ties, individuals contribute to a society where people uplift and rely on each other, reinforcing the shared human experience.

This perspective underscores the need for youth in Kilifi Deanery to foster strong community ties, support one another, and embrace a collective identity that transcends ethnic divisions. Ethnicity, when misinterpreted through the lens of relativism, can act as a barrier rather than a bridge toward social cohesion. In Kilifi Deanery, the impact of ethnicity manifests in real and tangible ways, affecting interpersonal relationships, governance participation, and economic advancement. The discussion presented here accurately reflects the complexities surrounding ethnicity among the youth in Kilifi Deanery, highlighting its relevance and resonance with the lived realities of the local population. Recognizing these challenges is essential in paving the way for informed discourse and constructive engagement on identity and community relations.

2.4.6 Corruption and Moral Relativism among the Youth

Corruption among the youth in Kilifi is deeply intertwined with moral relativism, where ethical standards are shaped by subjective interpretations rather than universal principles. As

[188] Steve Patterson, "Combatting Tribalism & Hate Politics: A Call for Responsibility, Accountability, & Respect," retrieved from https://windandraven.com/blog/tribalism-hate-politics-threat-to-society/ (accessed 27/05/2024).
[189] A Pastoral agent, (name withheld upon request), interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala parish, 17/02/2024.
[190] *Bill Sutherland and Matt Meyer, Guns and Gandhi in Africa: Pan-African Insights on Nonviolence, Armed Struggle and Liberation* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2000), 11.

values become fluid, corrupt practices such as bribery and favoritism are often justified as necessary means for survival or social advancement. According to U Myint, "corruption is defined as the use of public office for private gain, or in other words, use of official position, rank or status by an office bearer for his own personal benefit."[191] Corruption is an unethical practice that undermines trust, fairness, and proper governance, allowing self-serving actions to take precedence over accountability and responsibility. It weakens governance and limits access to equitable opportunities. Understanding corruption within this relativistic framework provides insight into its broader impact on societal development and youth empowerment. The prevalence of corruption is not merely an isolated issue but is deeply embedded within social and political frameworks.

As Adamolekun and Bryant note "it is the level of its prevalence… that differentiates one country from another in the scale of corruption perception index."[192] This observation underscores the reality that corruption is not inherently uniform across societies, it thrives where ethical relativism allows it to be rationalized rather than condemned. In Kenya, for instance, corruption has been ingrained in national ethos, politics, civil society, and both public and private sectors. Kenya has faced significant challenges related to corruption. The impact on youth goes beyond economic consequences, shaping their worldview. John Kazungu explains that "when young people are exposed to corruption firsthand, their confidence in ethical principles diminishes. In environments where corrupt behaviour is widely accepted, individuals often rationalize unethical actions by asserting that "everyone does it," leading youth to believe that corruption is acceptable as long as it serves their personal interests."[193] This normalization of dishonesty undermines moral integrity and fosters a culture where ethical standards are disregarded in favor of self-benefit. Corruption often perpetuates nepotism within the public and private sectors. Deserving youths have been denied opportunities due to favoritism, and others have given in to abuses in search of jobs.

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[191] U Myint, "Corruption: Causes, Consequences and Cures," *Asia-Pacific Development Journal* 7, no. 2 (2000): 33–58, 35. In Burmese naming conventions, "U" is an honorific title rather than an initial. It is commonly used to show respect, similar to "Mr." in English. So, U Myint is his full name. Burmese refers to the people, language, and culture of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). Myanmar is a Southeast Asian country bordering Thailand, Laos, China, India, and Bangladesh. It has a rich history, diverse ethnic groups, and strong cultural traditions influenced by Buddhism.

[192] Adamolekun & Bryant, "Institutionalization of Corruption in Kenya: A Review of Disintegration of the Moral Fabric," *African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* (*AJHSS*), no. 1 (2019): 61-65, 61.

[193] John Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Maweni, Kikambala, 23/02/2024.

The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) has consistently spoken out against corruption, urging leaders to uphold integrity and justice in governance, urging the Government leaders to mitigate corruption and address the high cost of living that has deeply affected and shaken the social fabric of the Kenyan people.[194] Corruption is a great monster, a social sin that has been normalized at various levels of life today. Melchior Marandu observes:

> Social sin refers to the evil dimensions of our social life, the disgraces and brokenness of our human society that calls for conversion, healing and restructuring. One takes part in social sin by creating or supporting sinful social structures which violate human dignity, promote inequality; and individual acts of selfishness. Equally true, by remaining silent without denouncing sinful social structures, we fail to exercise our prophetic mission given to us through baptism. By virtue of our baptism, we should avoid being part of the beneficiaries of oppressive social systems or remaining silent and passive in the face of injustices.[195]

Melchior Marandu's observation on social sin is deeply connected to corruption, as corruption creates unjust structures that violate human dignity and promote inequality. Corruption thrives when individuals engage in bribery, but also when society remains silent and fails to challenge these unethical practices. Samuel Waje defines bribery as: "The act of giving money or favor to someone who is in a position of trust in order to pervert a judgment. It is intended to make a person act illegally, unjustly or immorally. In a corrupt government, people adopt utilitarian ethic: the end justifies the means. People feel free to use immoral methods and to abuse other people's trust in the pursuit of their own interest"[196] Bribery, as a product of corruption, hinders development and prevents the effective delivery of essential services, particularly to the poor and marginalized. It distorts resource allocation, allowing wealth and opportunity to concentrate in the hands of a few while depriving vulnerable communities of their rightful access to education, healthcare, and economic support. One major consequence is the impact on youth empowerment, as bribery limits opportunities, discourages merit-based advancement, and denies young people access to fair employment and leadership roles. When corruption dictates progress, society remains stagnant, leaving the most disadvantaged without

[194] The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Kenyan Catholic Bishops urge Government to find solutions to the high cost of living," retrieved from https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2023-11/kenyan-catholic-bishops-urge-government-to-find-solutions-to-the.html (accessed 13/07/2024).
[195] Melchior Marandu, "Universal Brokenness and Social Sin," in "*Justice and Governance in Africa" HEKIMA Review Journal of Theology, Governance and Peace Studies*, no. 60 (December, 2019): 56-64, 58.
[196] Samuel Waje, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2008), 165, 167.

the support they need to thrive. We all are suffering due to corruption by many ways as Mary Mbeyu explains:

> Corruption undermines democracy and good governance by subverting formal processes, reducing accountability, and distorting policymaking representation. In the judiciary, it compromises the rule of law, while in public administration, it leads to inefficient service delivery. Violating the core principle of republicanism centered on civic virtue, corruption weakens institutional capacity as procedures are ignored, resources are drained, and public offices are traded for personal gain. Ultimately, it erodes government legitimacy, fostering distrust and instability.[197]

When corruption becomes normalized, it erodes governance, fosters societal divisions, and perpetuates injustice, ranking among the gravest social sins. Addressing corruption requires a collective effort, where individuals resist oppressive systems instead of passively accepting or benefiting from them. Silence in the face of corruption enables harmful forces to thrive, making inaction a form of complicity. Upholding ethical values and advocating for positive change are essential in preventing corruption from undermining justice and development. The church, as a moral compass in society, has a critical role in confronting corruption and guiding people towards righteousness. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta's words to the AMECEA Bishops serve as a powerful reminder of this mission:

> One of the services you give to others is to help keep them going in the right direction. We may have many distractions and can wander off the path. We do need to be constantly put back on it again. Then, too, most of us are not theologians, and in the complexities of modern life, we may not even know we are going astray, that we are making the wrong decision. That is why we need the church in our midst to tell us when we are making a mistake.[198]

Despite constitutional provisions such as Article 79 criminalizing corruption, enforcement remains weak. Corruption is a real problem affecting the society as Marandu writes: "Due to corruption, people lack essential services such as medicine in Government hospitals, teaching materials in schools, good roads, water supply and other public amenities. Corruption deserves to be called a deadly reality, since it actually leads to the death of innocent people"[199] Scholars like Constance Bansikiza affirm the devastating effects of corruption, stating: "Corruption continues to cut from the roots, the unity and peace of Africa. It stifles the hope of socio-economic

[197] Mary Mbeyu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 26/02/2024.
[198] Rodrigo Mejia (ed.), *The Conscience of Society: 1960-1995* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1995), 50; Cf. Laurenti Magesa, "Theological Reflections, Taking Strategic Positions: Church, Media, Politics, and Society in Contemporary Africa," *Journal of Hekima Review*, no.49 (2013), 8-19, 16.
[199] Melchior Marandu, "*Universal Brokenness and Social Sin*." 62.

development…"[200] Kanyandago, quoting Waliggo, further explains the harmful nature of corruption:

> Corruption has so many faces and operates in all strata of life … breaking, destroying, disrupting, and distorting life, community, society, and environment. It goes against normality, the smooth growth, the integrity, harmony, justice, virtue and values. Corruption is violence done to people by people, to environment and to the future generation. It is an evil with a very high power of multiplying itself to infect entire communities.[201]

Corruption weakens social unity by making unethical behavior a common and accepted practice. In Kilifi County, it has deeply influenced young people, shaping their views on right and wrong and leading to widespread moral uncertainty. This study examines how corruption affects youth empowerment, focusing on its impact on values, leadership, and community trust. Interviews with 60 Catholic Men Association (CMA) members and 30 youth revealed troubling trends: bribery in job recruitment (86.7%) blocks deserving candidates from fair employment, pushing them into unstable jobs; favoritism in leadership (82.2%) discourages fairness, frustrating educated but unemployed youth; cheating in education (75.6%) allows students to buy exam papers, lowering the quality of graduates; and political manipulation (80%) lures youth with money in exchange for votes, reinforcing dependence on corrupt systems. Additionally, 70% of respondents noted that corruption has normalized dishonest practices, while 74.4% linked it to youth radicalization. A strong majority (85.6%) stressed the urgent need for reforms and ethical leadership to restore integrity. These findings show how corruption spreads across different areas, damaging trust, limiting opportunities, and undermining the moral development of young people in Kilifi County.

The findings of this study show that corruption has severely weakened ethical standards among the youth in Kilifi Deanery. Many young people justify dishonest practices as necessary for survival. The widespread prevalence of bribery and nepotism has led to a decline in trust in governance, as opportunities are awarded based on favoritism rather than competence. Similarly, academic fraud has devalued education, discouraging diligence and undermining the principle of success based on merit. Political exploitation further reinforces unethical leadership models, shaping corruption as an accepted route to influence and economic advancement. Moreover, moral relativism has blurred ethical boundaries, compelling young people to compromise their

[200] Constance Bansikiza, *Consolidating Unity and Peace in Africa* (Eldoret: Kolbe Press, 2004), 103.
[201] Peter Kanyandago, "Corruption: The Elite are to Blame," *Leadership*, 360 (1997), 9.

values in pursuit of opportunities. Without urgent intervention through governance reforms, integrity-driven education, and strengthened moral advocacy, corruption will continue to obstruct youth development, deepen socio-economic inequalities, and weaken leadership accountability in Kilifi Deanery.

2.4.7 Decline of African Traditional moral Value

The erosion of African traditional moral values among the youth is a direct consequence of moral relativism, where ethical principles are increasingly viewed as subjective. Communal virtues such as respect, integrity, and social responsibility, once central to African society, are gradually being replaced by individualism and self-interest. Influences such as political corruption, globalization, and weakened cultural structures have contributed to this decline, fostering a generation that rationalizes unethical behaviour for personal gain. In traditional Midzi-Chenda settings, both the family and the broader society play a crucial role in imparting moral values to young people. As Racheal Mafumbate argues, "the family serves as the primary institution for transmitting ethical principles, shaping young individuals into responsible members of society."[202] Among the Midzi-Chenda people, values such as honesty, compassion, justice, and loyalty are fundamental in guiding behavior and decision-making, ensuring that individuals act in accordance with communal standards. However, in modern society, these principles have been weakened and replaced by a more individualistic approach to morality.

The evolving moral landscape among young people today reflects a significant shift in value systems, where subjective interpretations often override traditional ethical principles. As John Mbuya asserts, "the concerns of many young people today are never about the grounds of values, but instead, about feelings, reasonings, and calculations about what will make me happy. They never ask questions about virtues and vices, about character, but ask only about what you would do, or rather what you would 'feel comfortable' doing."[203] This perspective underscores a departure from virtue-based ethics toward an individualistic approach where moral decisions are primarily guided by personal comfort rather than fundamental notions of right and wrong. The influence of cultural globalization has further accelerated this moral transformation. Egbeke Aja

[202] Racheal Mafumbate, "The Undiluted African Community: Values, The Family, Orphanage and Wellness in Traditional Africa," retrieved from https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Undiluted%20African%20Community (accessed 19/07/2024).
[203] John Mbuya, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 22/02/2024.

observes that "due to cultural shifts, the exposure to diverse cultures and global perspectives has led to a shift in the way young people perceive traditional values… often results in questioning and sometimes rejecting traditional norms and practice"[204] African moral values, once deeply embedded in community structures, are increasingly under threat due to external influences.

The rise of modern education and technology has introduced cultural paradigms that conflict with established traditions, leading to a decline in adherence to conventional moral standards as youth adopt more contemporary lifestyles. This transformation manifests in various ways, as young people increasingly embrace foreign values and practices that challenge the ethical norms of their heritage. As Collins Alyce explains:

> Many young people today participate in actions that seem to be immoral, such as drug usage, same sex union, casual sex, and disdain for the law. They dress and carry themselves with things like piercings and tattoos that were formerly frowned upon. This is being accepted as fashion and stylishness. Communal life that was held as core value has been overtaken by individuality above social duty and society. I am concerned that this attitude change will harm society.[205]

Alyce expresses concern over the shifting moral landscape, where young people increasingly adopt behaviours that contrast with traditional ethical standards. Changing social norms have led to the normalization of practices once considered unacceptable, such as substance abuse, disregard for legal authority, and individualism replacing communal responsibility. The emphasis on personal freedom and self-expression, often reflected in fashion and lifestyle choices, signifies a broader cultural shift that has weakened societal cohesion and ethical accountability. This demonstrates the extent to which global influences have reshaped youth perceptions of morality, leading to the normalization of behaviours once considered taboo. Alyce further warns that "this attitude change will harm society,"[206] emphasizing concerns about the long-term consequences of value erosion. This resonates with Agnes Zani's observation that

[204] Egbeke Aja, "Changing Moral Values in Africa: An Essay in Ethical Relativism," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 31 (1997): 531–543, 531.
[205] Collins Alyce, "It's Giving Spoilt Brat: Are Gen-Z and Millennials Fuelling a Decline in Traditional Moral Values?" retrieved from https://themoveee.com/2023/03/27/its-giving-spoilt-brat-are-gen-z-and-millennials-fuelling-a-decline-in-traditional-moral-values/ (accessed 20/07/2024).
[206] Collins Alyce, "It's Giving Spoilt Brat: Are Gen-Z and Millennials Fuelling a Decline in Traditional Moral Values?" retrieved from https://themoveee.com/2023/03/27/its-giving-spoilt-brat-are-gen-z-and-millennials-fuelling-a-decline-in-traditional-moral-values/ (accessed 20/07/2024).

"the rapidly changing social and cultural circumstances caused by modernization have adversely affected what and how values are passed down to the children"[207] in the families.

The decline of African traditional moral values cannot be discussed without addressing the role of families. Disruptions caused by technology, individualism, and misguided notions of freedom have negatively impacted the holistic formation of youth. Pope Francis warns that "… considerations need to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading … to the idea that one's personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute."[208] This shift leads to a fragmented society where self-interest overrides moral responsibility. As a result, youth develop attitudes that favor personal satisfaction rather than ethical principles. Esther Omoniyi reinforces this idea, noting that "The socio-cultural practices of communal life is fading away while most of the cultural heritage are being neglected…"[209] in the contemporary society.

The decline of African traditional moral values in Kilifi Deanery is evident in the shifting attitudes among youth, who increasingly prioritize individual gain over communal ethics. As Jane Kazungu notes "The normalization of bribery in job recruitment, favoritism in resource distribution, and disengagement from family responsibilities reflect a weakening of moral foundations once upheld by Midzi-Chenda traditions."[210] Young people seeking employment often face challenges, forcing them to resort to unethical means such as bribing officials, further entrenching corruption as a societal norm. Additionally, the rising influence of social media and globalized cultural ideals has led to the erosion of respect for elders, with youth favoring Western ideals of self-expression over community-driven responsibility. The embrace of substance abuse, casual relationships, and a disregard for traditional rites of passage signals a growing detachment from heritage, reinforcing moral relativism. As these shifts become more prevalent, Kilifi Deanery witnesses an increasing disconnect between generational values,

[207] Agnes Zani, "The Family in its African socio-context," in *The models of "Church- as-Family: Meeting the African challenge*, Patrick Ryan (eds.), Nairobi: CUEA Press, 1999, 46-55, 49.
[208] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Lætitia*, On The Joy of Love (19 March 2016), no. 33.
[209] Esther Omoniyi Mofoluwawo, "Impact of Cultural Globalization on African Moral Values: The Case of Nigeria," *Journal of Social Studies Department* 2, no. 7 (2019): 382-388, 381.
[210] Jane Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kilifi, 20/02/2024.

weakening social cohesion and fostering a climate where ethical standards are shaped by convenience rather than principle.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the multifaceted challenges of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery, highlighting the ideological shifts that have contributed to ethical uncertainty and the erosion of traditional moral frameworks. The interplay between globalization, emerging religious movements, evolving leadership structures, and parental influences has led to a complex reconfiguration of ethical principles, where subjective interpretations increasingly shape moral decision-making. These factors have fostered an environment in which youth navigate conflicting ideologies, often struggling to reconcile inherited cultural norms with contemporary perspectives on morality. The chapter has demonstrated that moral relativism does not merely challenge individual values but reshapes communal cohesion, influencing broader social structures and interactions.

Additionally, the impact of moral relativism is evident in the rise of individualism, secularism, materialism, tribalism, corruption, and the gradual decline of African traditional moral values. These elements have weakened the moral stability that once provided a sense of direction to young people, resulting in ethical ambiguity and increased susceptibility to ideological radicalization. The shifting moral landscape underscores the need for deeper examination of how moral relativism affects identity formation, societal cohesion, and governance. By assessing the causes and consequences of moral relativism, this discussion establishes a foundation for further exploration into ethical frameworks that can guide the youth toward a more balanced moral perspective in an evolving world.

CHAPTER THREE

A CRITICAL ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF MORAL RELATIVISM

Introduction

Building on the analysis in Chapter Two, which examined the shifting moral values among youth in Kilifi Deanery, this chapter provides a critical ethical inquiry into the concept of moral relativism. As traditional frameworks encounter the pressures of modern ideologies, globalization, and digital influence, moral relativism emerges as a prominent paradigm, one that challenges objective notions of right and wrong. This chapter seeks to engage the concept both philosophically and practically, offering a structured approach to understanding its foundations and its implications for contemporary moral life.

The discussion unfolds through seven interrelated thematic areas. First, the chapter clarifies the concept of moral relativism by examining its philosophical foundations and ethical relevance. Second, attention is given to the historical development of relativist thought, tracing its intellectual trajectory across time. Third, the analysis turns to the heresies and doctrinal distortions that emerge as consequences of relativistic ideologies. Fourth, consideration is given to the three principal categories of moral relativism: normative, descriptive, and meta-ethical, each offering distinct perspectives on moral reasoning. Fifth, the inquiry addresses the impact of relativism on the moral lives of youth, particularly regarding issues such as cyberbullying, online radicalization, digital addiction, and transactional relationships. Sixth, the discussion explores the essential components of moral acts, including the object, intention, circumstances, and consequences. Seventh, the evaluation draws on key ethical theories: deontology, consequentialism, communitarianism, and virtue ethics, to assess the integrity of human actions. Together, these thematic pillars offer a coherent and critical framework for understanding moral relativism and its far-reaching implications for both personal and societal morality.

3.1 Analysis of Moral Relativism

In today's shifting moral landscape, the rise of moral relativism signals a deep reconsideration of how societies define right and wrong. As universal ethical standards weaken, new challenges emerge around coherence, accountability, and the moral foundations of

communal life. Cara Biasucci defines moral relativism as "the idea that there is no universal or absolute set of moral principles. It's a version of morality that advocates to each her own, and those who follow it say, "Who am I to judge?"[211] While this view fosters tolerance, it also invites inconsistency and erodes common moral standards. Without universally accepted norms, individuals and communities struggle to find ethical consensus. Edward Freeman and Patricia Werhane explain, "Moral relativism is a view about the scope of our values and beliefs… holding that claims about what is right and wrong are relative to individual, social, and cultural boundaries; therefore one cannot judge what is right and wrong outside those individual, social, and cultural boundaries."[212] Consequently, all moral perspectives are treated as equally valid, weakening accountability and undermining moral discourse. These highlights that morality is not universal or fixed for everyone.

The practical implications of this outlook are particularly evident in Kilifi County, where culturally accepted practices such as teenage pregnancies and early marriages are deeply rooted in tradition, economic struggle, and limited access to education. From within these cultural contexts, early marriage may be viewed as securing a girl's future or preserving family honor. Joy Muga notes that "in Kilifi County, communities such as Magarini and Rabai have been identified as areas where early marriages and teenage pregnancies are particularly prevalent, often influenced by deeply rooted cultural norms and economic pressures."[213] The story of Kadzo, a 16-year-old girl who was married off by her grandparents after becoming pregnant, illustrates how normalized cultural practices can result in profound harm and exploitation. As narrated by Dennis Hombe, "All through her childhood, her grandparents were the sole providers. They had so much hope in her completing her schooling but the tables had turned and now they wanted her out of their home. Swiftly, they married her off to the father of her

[211] Cara Biasucci, "Moral Relativism," retrieved from https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/moral-relativism (accessed 06/11/2024). Ethics Unwrapped was created by Cara Biasucci, a filmmaker, author, and educator. She serves as the Creator and Director of Ethics Unwrapped and is also the Director of Ethics Education at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin.

[212] Edward Freeman, Daniel Gilbert & Patricia Werhane (eds.), "Moral Relativism," retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1417204 (accessed 19/06/2025).

[213] In an interview conducted by the researcher, Joy Muga highlighted the issue of early pregnancies and child marriage as a persistent challenge facing youth in Kilifi County. This concern was echoed during an open group discussion held on 21st February 2024 at the church compound of Kikamba Parish, where members of the Catholic Men Association (CMA) actively engaged in examining the cultural and socioeconomic factors fueling these practices. The discourse underscored the need for faith-based interventions and community collaboration to address these deeply rooted challenges.

child."[214] Her ordeal, marked by abuse and abandonment, reflects a deeper ethical conflict between cultural accommodation and the universal values of human dignity, informed consent, and child protection principles.

The researcher's inquiry into moral relativism among youth in Kilifi County arises from these ethically fraught intersections between tradition and universality. Within a relativistic moral climate, young people face ethical ambiguity, lacking clear standards for discerning right from wrong. This permissiveness may foster inclusion but can also erode communal coherence and ethical clarity. In contrast, moral absolutism grounded in the conviction that certain moral truths are universally valid, offers a framework for ethical evaluation anchored in the dignity of the human person. Robert Veatch affirms this principle when he states, "There is common morality, and the core idea is that all humans know that there is something wrong with things like lying, breaking promises, or killing people."[215] Bernard Gert develops this further through his "ordinary morality," asserting:

> … There are moral rules that forbid mankind from hurting one another, as common morality is based on five fundamental harms: Death, pain, disability, loss of freedom, and loss of pleasure. From these five harms, we get ten moral rules that capture the core of common morality: Do not kill, do not cause pain, do not disable, do not deprive of freedom, do not deprive of pleasure, do not deceive, keep your promises, do not cheat, obey the law, do your duty.[216]

Gert's theory of ordinary morality suggests that across cultures, there is a shared moral foundation rooted in a common human desire to avoid harm. People generally agree, regardless of their background that causing certain kinds of harm is wrong. This principle aligns intriguingly with Kant's concept of the categorical imperative. For Kant (1724 – 1804 CE), morality is governed not by outcomes or emotions but by reason and the Good Will, which compels us to act from duty according to principles that can be universally applied. Kant has three formulations of this principle: First, act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law. Second, so act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never

[214] Dennis Hombe, "Being a teen mother in Kilifi," retrieved from https://home.creaw.org/2020/01/30/being-a-teen-mum-in-kilifi/ (accessed 19/06/2025).
[215] Robert M. Veatch, "Is there a Common Morality?" Retrieved from https://muse.jhu.edu/article/46591#:~:text=The%20core%20idea%20of%20a%20common%20morality%20is,like%20lying%20or%20breaking%20promises%20or%20killing%20people (accessed 29/08/2025).
[216] Bernard Gert, *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12 & 20.

merely as a means. Third, every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends.[217]

These formulations provide a systematic moral vision rooted in reason, consistency, and respect for human dignity. The first promotes logical universality in moral rules; the second insists on honoring the intrinsic value of persons; and the third calls for cooperative moral legislation within a community of rational agents. Kantian ethics thus elevates moral responsibility from isolated decision-making to collective ethical stewardship. Such frameworks are crucial when confronting context-bound practices that mask underlying injustices. In Kilifi, the rising phenomenon of elder killings reveals a disturbing manipulation of tradition. Investigations by *Haki Yetu* and BBC Africa Eye show that "Such killings are in fact driven by land disputes, economic interests, and intergenerational tensions, with witchcraft allegations serving as socially sanctioned pretexts to mask ulterior motives."[218] These are often a cover for deeper disputes over land ownership and inheritance. As Katana Mbodze explains, "many elderly individuals especially men who traditionally hold land rights are targeted under the pretense of witchcraft, but the underlying motive is frequently to seize their land."[219] In a region where land documentation is scarce and customary inheritance carries weight, eliminating elders often removes the living custodians of land history. Katana further states "once you kill them, then you have removed the obstacle"[220] to claiming land. These targeted acts of violence, cloaked in cultural justification, exemplify the ethical peril of relativism unmoored from shared moral standards.

3.2 Historical Background of Moral Relativism

In contemporary society, moral relativism remains a debated topic in philosophy, with arguments for and against it continuing to evolve, especially among the youth in the 21st century. Emrys Westacott writes: "Relativistic views of morality first found expression in the 5th century in Greece but remained largely dormant until the 19th and 20th centuries. During this time, several

[217] Emmanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: With, on a Supposed Right to Die Because of Philanthropic Concerns*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981), 194 & 195.
[218] Haki Yetu and BBC Africa Eye, "Accused of witchcraft then murdered for land," retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4ng3z3j421o (accessed 19/06/2025).
[219] Katana Mbodze, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 25/02/2024.
[220] Katana Mbodze, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 25/02/2024.

factors converged to make moral relativism appear plausible."[221] It is important to note that the 19th and 20th centuries were a period of enlightenment. Catherine Wilson remarked that "during this period, the emphasis was on reason, individualism, and scientific inquiries. Philosophers began questioning traditional authorities and exploring new ways of understanding morality, paving the way for moral relativism."[222] This perception had a significant impact on the moral lives of people. Various thinkers throughout history have supported relativism, often in response to growing awareness of moral diversity across cultures and time. The intellectual curiosity led to the recognition that moral beliefs are not fixed, but vary according to cultural or individual perspectives.

The philosophical foundations of moral relativism can be traced back to ancient Greece, where early Sophists laid the groundwork for rejecting universal moral absolutes. Protagoras, for instance, famously stated that "Man is the measure of all things,"[223] suggesting that truth and reality are determined by individual perception rather than objective standards. In this view, what one person experiences as true such as feeling cold, may not hold for another, yet both perceptions are equally valid. This challenges the notion of objective truth and centers human experience as the basis of knowledge and morality. Similarly, Thrasymachus, as portrayed in Plato's Republic, argued that justice serves the interests of the powerful. He claimed:

> The norms considered just are nothing more than conventions which hamper those who adhere to them, and benefit those who flout them. Those who behave unjustly naturally gain power and become the rulers, the strong people in society. Justice is the advantage of the stronger because when stupid, weak people behave in accordance with justice, they are disadvantaged, and the strong (those who behave unjustly) are advantaged.[224]

This perspective laid the groundwork for *relativistic* ethics by asserting that truth and morality are shaped by perspective and power dynamics rather than objective standards. A Scottish philosopher, David Hume, a supporter of relativism, believed that moral sentiment, or the feelings we have about right and wrong, is the foundation of morality. He argued:

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[221] Emrys Westacott, "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Moral Relativism," retrieved from https://iep.utm.edu/moral-re/#H1 (accessed 27/08/2024).
[222] Catherine Wilson, "Realism and Relativism in Ethics," retrieved from https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/34545/chapter-abstract/293057246?redirectedFrom=fulltext (accessed 27/04/2025).
[223] Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. M.J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 152a.
[224] Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 338c.

> Moral beliefs are based on "sentiments," or emotions (emotivism), rather than on reason. Right and wrong are relative to individual preferences rather than to social standards. Instead, it arises from our emotions and the way we respond to the experiences of others. Humans naturally feel sympathy, which allows us to connect with the happiness or suffering of others. This shared emotional experience helps guide our moral judgments. Morality is not about objective rules or truths. Instead, it is based on how actions and behaviours evoke feelings of approval or disapproval within us. When we feel a sense of approval for an act, it seems virtuous or good. Conversely, when we feel disapproval, the act feels wrong or immoral. These feelings are universal in the sense that humans tend to agree in their responses, but they are rooted in human nature rather than pure logic or abstract reasoning.[225]

Friedrich Nietzsche supported moral relativism by challenging the existence of absolute moral truths and asserting that values are human-made constructs rather than divine or universal mandates. His famous declaration that "God is dead," with the decline of belief in a divine moral authority, humanity was left without a fixed foundation for truth or ethics…"[226] This emphasis on subjective value creation and the rejection of universal moral standards places Nietzsche firmly within the tradition of moral relativism, where meaning and morality are seen as contingent on individual or cultural perspectives rather than objective truths. We note that all these thinkers argued against objective truth in favour of a more pragmatist approach to understanding moral and philosophical issues. The supporters of moral relativism, such as Edward Westermarck argue that, "Relativistic morality is the only kind of morality there is."[227] According to them, moral values are human constructs that can change over time and across different societies. They all contributed significantly to the development and discussion of moral relativism, and each brought unique perspectives to the concept.

3.3 Heresies as a Consequence of Moral Relativism

Moral relativism erodes belief in absolute truth, weakening the authority of divine revelation and opening the door to doctrinal distortion. When individuals become the sole arbiters of right and wrong, foundational teachings risk reinterpretation or rejection. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes, "Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some

[225] David Hume, "Philosophy and Moral Sentiment: Philosophies of Life," retrieved from https://philosophiesoflife.org/david-humes-philosophy-and-moral-sentiment/ (accessed 19/06/2024).
[226] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181.
[227] Edward Westermarck, "Ethics Are Relative," retrieved from https://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/articles/westermarck/t1.htm (accessed 26/06/2025).

truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same; apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith"[228] In such a climate, heresies take root, as seen historically in Arianism, Gnosticism, and Pelagianism, each emerging from a departure from objective truth and the Church's magisterial authority as briefly discussed below:

Arianism: This arose in the 4th century through Arius of Alexandria, who taught that Christ was a created being and not co-eternal with the Father. He argued, "Because the Godhead is immutable, the Son, who is mutable, must, therefore, be deemed a creature who has been called into existence out of nothing and has had a beginning… Moreover, the Son can have no direct knowledge of the Father, since the Son is finite and of a different order of existence."[229] This belief was summarized in the slogan, "there was a time when the Son was not," as cited by Socrates of Constantinople: "If the Father Begat the Son... it is evident that there was a time when the Son was not."[230] Such teaching denied Christ's full divinity and fractured Trinitarian doctrine. In response, St. Athanasius affirmed, "The Word of God came in His own person, because it was He alone, the image of the Father, who could recreate man made after the image."[231] The First Council of Nicaea in AD 325 condemned Arianism, affirming that the Son is *homoousios*, of the same substance as the Father, enshrined in the Nicene Creed.

Gnosticism: This was a notable heretical movement of the 2nd-century. According to its teaching, "salvation comes through gnosis (secret knowledge) accessible only to a spiritual elite. It portrayed the material world as evil, created by a lesser deity (the demiurge), and denied Christ's true humanity, claiming He only appeared to have a physical body (Docetism)."[232] These views contradicted core Christian doctrines of creation and the Incarnation. Church Fathers like Irenaeus and Tertullian firmly opposed Gnosticism, upholding apostolic teaching and affirming Christ's full divinity and humanity.[233] Though predating formal councils,

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[228] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no 2089.
[229] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Arianism Christianity," retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arianism (accessed 25/06/2025).
[230] Socrates Scholasticus, The Ecclesiastical History, Book I, chap. 5," retrieved from https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.i.v.html (accessed 25/06/2025).
[231] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 13.
[232] Dan Graves, "Gnosticism," retrieved from https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1-300/gnosticism-11629621.html (accessed 25/06/2025).
[233] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), Book I, chap. 1.

Gnosticism was unequivocally rejected by the early Church as incompatible with the Christian faith.

Pelagianism arose in the early 5th century through Pelagius, a British monk who denied original sin and taught that humans could achieve moral perfection through free will alone, without divine grace. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: "Pelagius held that man could, by the natural power of free will and without the necessary help of God's grace, lead a morally good life,"[234] thereby reducing Adam's sin to mere bad example. In sharp opposition, St. Augustine asserted that "humanity's fallen nature renders it entirely dependent on God's grace for salvation, pointed out that Pelagianism is not a mere error, but a deadly heresy, and strikes at the very centre of Christianity."[235] The Church condemned the teaching at the Council of Carthage (418), later reaffirmed by the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Orange (529) for distorting the role of grace and Christ's redemptive work.

Modernism: This is a theological heresy emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It sought to reconcile Catholic faith with modern thought by reducing divine revelation to subjective experience and treating dogma as mutable. According to Pope Pius X modernists hold that, "there is to be nothing stable, and nothing immutable in the Church."[236] In their view, the Church must adapt its teachings to modern thought, shaped by culture, history, and personal experience. This perception risks turning eternal truths into shifting opinions. He condemned this view in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* ("Feeding the Lord's Flock"), calling it "the synthesis of all heresies… attempting the task of collecting together all the errors that have been broached against the faith and to concentrate the sap and substance of them all into one."[237] Modernism was particularly dangerous because it did not present itself as open rebellion but as a subtle reinterpretation of faith under the guise of progress. Figures like Alfred Loisy and George TyrrellI[238] challenged the permanence of dogma and the divine origin of Church teachings. The

[234] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 406.
[235] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy: The doctrines and theology of Pelagius in the early Christian Church* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 2019), 69.
[236] Pius x, Encyclical Letter *Pascendi Dominici Gregis,* On the Doctrines of the Modernists (September 8, 1907): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 40 (1907), 593–650, 28.
[237] Pius x, Encyclical Letter *Pascendi Dominici Gregis,* On the Doctrines of the Modernists (September 8, 1907): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 40 (1907), 593–650, 39.
[238] Both priests became central figures in the Modernist movement and both were eventually excommunicated for their views.

Holy Office condemned Modernism in *Lamentabili Sane Exitu*[239] (1907) and clergy were bound by the 1910 Oath against Modernism.

While the Church confronted these heresies, this study turns its focus to emerging distortions of doctrine affecting youth in Kilifi County as heresies. These include religious syncretism, prosperity gospel distortions, indifferentism, and rejection of ecclesial authority, each of which qualifies as heretical in that they deviate from core truths professed by the Catholic Church. Moses Mbedza (not his real name) a pastoral agent explains that "These deviations are especially prevalent due to socioeconomic vulnerability, limited catechetical instruction, and spiritual manipulation."[240] From his sharing, poverty, weak catechesis, and spiritual manipulation make Kilifi youth more vulnerable to false teachings that distort Catholic doctrine. According to Mbedza:

> Religious syncretism blends incompatible belief systems such as Christianity with traditional or Islamic practices, thus obscuring doctrinal clarity and echoing neo-pagan or gnostic tendencies. The prosperity gospel distorts Christian teaching by promoting material gain as a sign of divine favor, undermining the Church's understanding of grace and the redemptive value of suffering. Indifferentism, often fueled by weak catechesis and digital misinformation, claims all religions hold equal truth, contradicting the uniqueness of divine revelation. Meanwhile, within the church, there are "isolated sects or charismatic figures" who claim direct revelation reflects threatening what the Catholic Church teaches and sacramental life. [241]

Young people in Kilifi County are caught in a complex cultural and religious environment where traditional beliefs, economic hardship, and limited religious formation leave them open to distorted teachings. These influences subtly shift them away from core Catholic truths, not through open rejection, but through gradual adaptation to appealing yet misleading ideas. The persistence of such heresies reflects not only intellectual misunderstanding but deeper social and spiritual gaps among youth in Kilifi. As such, they demand recognition not merely as errors of belief but as urgent pastoral concerns requiring renewed formation, authentic evangelization, and sustained accompaniment.

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[239] *Lamentabili Sane Exitu* is a decree issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) on July 3, 1907, under the authority of Pope Pius X. It is often referred to as the Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists. His document lists 65 propositions drawn from the writings of Modernist theologians and explicitly condemns them as erroneous. It served as a doctrinal companion to the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*.

[240] Moses Mbedza, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 29/01/2024.

[241] Moses Mbedza, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 29/01/2024.

The historical and contemporary rise of heresies such as Arianism, Gnosticism, Pelagianism, and Modernism illustrates the theological danger that emerges when moral and doctrinal absolutes are replaced with subjective interpretations. These deviations often take root in environments where personal or cultural perspectives override universal truth, a phenomenon closely tied to the philosophical framework of moral relativism. To understand how this mindset affects belief and behaviour, especially among youth in Kilifi County, it is important to explore its philosophical roots. The next section examines three main types of moral relativism: normative, descriptive, and meta-ethical. Each type shows how people form moral judgments in different contexts, sometimes at the cost of objective truth.

3.4 The Types of Moral Relativism

This discussion concerns the philosophical view that moral judgments and values are not absolute but relative to the cultural, societal, or individual contexts in which they occur. What is morally right or wrong can vary significantly across cultures and individuals. In this study, we consider the three main types of moral relativism: normative/prescriptive, descriptive/cultural, and meta-ethical/universal moral relativism.

3.5 Normative/ prescriptive Moral Relativism

Normative or prescriptive moral relativism holds that moral standards are not universally fixed but are instead shaped by cultural norms or individual convictions. Paul Stearns defines it as "the idea that there are no objective or universal standards of morality. No culture is objectively incorrect because each culture creates its morality. There is no moral truth. Truth is relative to the culture or individual. Morality ultimately depends on nothing but the approval of that society."[242] To understand this view, it is important to distinguish between its two primary forms: conventionalism and subjectivism. As Yohannes Eshetu explains "the codes of morality are relative to a culture or society, while subjectivism holds that the validity of moral principles is determined by individual choices. The person makes ethical decisions about what is morally

[242] Paul Stearns, "Moral Relativism, Objectivism, Absolutism, Universalism, Subjectivism, Nihilism," retrieved from https://lucidphilosophy.com/8542/#:~:text=We%20can%20divide%20descriptive%20relativism%20into%20two%20types:%20group%20relativism (accessed 21/06/2024).

good and evil and is responsible for setting up their principles."[243] This relativist stance, however, faces strong critique for potentially enabling harmful practices under the pretext of tolerance.

John Ladd underscores this risk, noting that "the doctrine of conventionalism holds that the moral rightness of actions varies from society to society and there are no absolute universal moral standards binding all men at all times."[244] By dismissing universal principles, relativism risks undermining shared responsibility and ethical accountability. In contrast, Eshetu contends that "there are universal objective moral principles which transcend cultural circumstances and are universally binding upon everyone at all times,"[245] challenging the relativist position. Similarly, Hans Küng introduces the notion of global ethics found across different cultures and societies, even if they are expressed differently, arguing:

> Global ethics is anchored in two foundational principles: the Golden Rule and the mandate to treat all human beings humanely. Based on these principles four moral commitments that he termed as directives; describing them as irrevocable because they are unchanging and unconditional since they apply to everyone without exception…They provide moral orientations. These four directives are commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life, commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order, commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness, commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.[246]

Küng and Eshetu converge on the view that shared moral norms are vital for cooperation and peaceful coexistence among diverse societies. Echoing this concern for moral cohesion, Jonathan Sacks warns that "… Only a virtuous person is capable of freedom. A society or a nation forms a moral person, and every member is personally responsible for his society. Morality is liberty, the freedom to do what we ought with license. Lose morality, and eventually, you will lose liberty."[247] This highlights the societal role in cultivating individual morality and asserting that liberty is sustained through adherence to moral obligations. Enno Winkler similarly asserts "We need some common rules of conduct that tell us how we ought

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[243] Yohannes Eshetu, "Understanding Cultural Relativism: A critical Appraisal of the Theory," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multi-religious Understanding* 4, no. 6 (2017):24-30, 25.
[244] Louis Pojman, *Philosophy: The Pursuit of Wisdom, 3rd Edition* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publication, 2001), 257.
[245] Yohannes Eshetu, "Understanding Cultural Relativism: A critical Appraisal of the Theory," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multi-religious Understandin*g 4, no. 6 (2017):24-30, 24.
[246] Hans Küng, "Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration," retrieved from https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/hans-kung-and-the-global-ethic (accessed 10/06/2025).
[247] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 26 & 27.

to act and when it is in our power to choose…"[248] Morality is the crucial for survival. no tribe or other community can hold together if behaviours such as murder, robbery, falseness, drug and substance abuse become widespread.

Shared ethical norms like prohibitions against murder, theft, deceit, and harmful behaviours are not just philosophical ideals but practical necessities. Without these common rules of conduct, trust breaks down, social bonds weaken, and the group risks disintegration. Patrick Devlin further underscores:

> A shared morality is essential to society. A society is not simply a collection of individuals doing what they like... It essentially and inescapably has a foundation in shared beliefs about the right and the bad. No society can exist without shared ideas on morals and ethics. If men and women try to create a society without fundamental agreement about good and evil, they will disintegrate. Societies disintegrate from within more frequently than broken up by external pressures. There is disintegration when no common morality is observed, and history shows that loosening moral bonds is often the first stage of disintegration, so society is justified in taking the same steps to preserve its moral code as it does to preserve its government and other essential institutions.[249]

Morality serves as a unifying force essential to both social survival and liberty. Sacks critiques the shift from collective responsibility to individual autonomy, warning that "world of relativism, non-judgmentalism, subjectivity, autonomy, individual rights, and self-esteem. The gains of this long process have been many, but the loss, too, has been profound. The revolutionary shift from "We" to "I"[250] has left societies morally fragmented. In Sacks' words, "… morality is what allows us to get on with one another… It has always been about the first-person plural, 'We,'"[251] reinforcing the idea that morality transcends preference. It is the binding agent of social life. Augustine Shutte echoes this view, noting that "if a tradition is removed from a community, and nothing is offered as a replacement, there is a danger of a 'moral vacuum, where something has gone, and nothing has replaced it."[252] A society is constituted by a shared

[248] Enno Winkler, "Are Universal Ethics Necessary? And Possible? A Systematic Theory of Universal Ethics and a Code for Global Moral Education," retrieved from https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43545-022-00350-7 (accessed 10/06/2025).
[249] Patrick Devlin, *Morals and the Criminal Law in the Enforcement of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1 & 25.
[250] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2020), 89.
[251] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality*, 26.
[252]Augustine Shuttle, *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 1.

morality. It is not just a social preference, it is the glue that binds people into a functional and enduring community.

In Kilifi Deanery, the implications of normative moral relativism are increasingly evident among the youth. Many young people adopt moral perspectives shaped primarily by cultural habits or personal opinion, often detached from shared ethical foundations. While cultural identity is vital, the belief that morality is wholly determined by individual or societal approval risks fostering moral ambiguity and weakening communal responsibility. The erosion of moral consensus contributes to behaviors such as substance abuse, dishonesty, and sexual promiscuity, which destabilize family and community life. The youth in Kilifi are thus called to uphold values such as respect, justice, truthfulness, and solidarity, not as constraints, but as essential principles for freedom, unity, and lasting peace. Morality, far from limiting personal expression, is the very foundation upon which meaningful freedom and social harmony rest.

3.5.1 Descriptive Moral Relativism (Cultural Relativism)

Descriptive moral relativism asserts that moral beliefs and practices are specific to particular societies and should be understood within their cultural contexts. Paul Stearns defines it as "the idea that moral values and practices are culturally specific and can vary significantly between different societies. It claims that there is no objective way to judge the moral practices of a culture. No culture is objectively incorrect."[253] Unlike normative relativism, which advocates moral adherence to cultural norms, descriptive relativism seeks to observe and describe moral diversity without judgment. For example, the belief among the Mijikenda that the coastal region is their ancestral land demonstrates how cultural identity shapes moral interpretation. From a descriptive perspective, this belief is acknowledged as a cultural reality without endorsing or opposing its ethical implications. This position aligns with Daniel Shaw's concept of conventionalism "the belief that each culture or group should devise its own set of

[253] Paul Stearns, Paul Stearns, "Moral Relativism, Objectivism, Absolutism, Universalism, Subjectivism, Nihilism," retrieved from https=We%20can%0descriptive%20relativism%20into%20two%20types:%20group%20relativism (accessed 21/06/2025).

rules and standards that apply to that culture alone."[254] This underscores that each culture has the right to define its own moral standards without being judged by external or universal norms.

Louis Pojman reinforces this view through the diversity thesis that conceptions of right and wrong vary between societies and the dependency thesis, which states: First, a diversity thesis specifies that what is considered right and wrong varies from society to society. Hence, all societies accept no moral principles. Second, a dependency thesis specifies that all ethical principles derive their validity from cultural acceptance. The dependency thesis clarifies that the cultural context from which they are ingrained determines what is morally right and wrong.[255] In this view, morality is not fixed or absolute but determined by the norms embraced within each community. Pojman illustrates this point with the analogy that "Trying to see things from an independent, non-cultural point of view would be like taking out our eyes to examine their contours and qualities. Relativism helps overcome the sins of ethnocentrism."[256] This foster tolerance, reducing prejudice, and encouraging peaceful coexistence among diverse groups. Yohannes Eshetu likewise argues:

> In cultural relativism, moral values are bound to cultural factors and are also deemed to be appraised by the standards which are embedded within the culture itself. The merit of cultural relativism is related with its ability to animate people to be open-minded towards the customs and values of various societies other than their own. The theory guards us against the danger of interpreting the values of "others" from a narrow sense of one's customs and values and cultural domination under the guise of objective moral standards.[257]

From this perspective, Eshetu underscores the importance of interpreting moral systems within their cultural frameworks, urging respect for cultural diversity without imposing external ethical assumptions. His view highlights the value of humility and cultural sensitivity when engaging with moral beliefs different from one's own. It underscores that societies have different conceptions of good. What is believed to be "good" in a particular society might be wrong in other cultures and vice versa. In the Kenyan context, cultural relativism illuminates both the richness and complexity of moral life. While some customs foster cohesion, others conflict with

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[254] Daniel Shaw, "3.3.2 Ethics and Culture: Ethical Relativism," retrieved from https://pressbooks.ccconline.org/introtophilosophy/text=Ethical%20relativists% Ethical%20relativists%20hold% (accessed 20/06/2025).
[255] Louis Pojman, *Philosophy: The Pursuit of Wisdom, 3d edition* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), 257 & 261.
[256] Louis Pojman, *Philosophy: The Pursuit of Wisdom*, 257.
[257] Yohannes Eshetu, "Understanding Cultural Relativism: A critical Appraisal of the Theory," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding (IJMMU)* 4, no. 6 (2017): 24-30, 26.

human dignity. Female genital mutilation (FGM), for example, is defended by certain communities as a rite of passage, yet as *the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA)* explains, "FGM violates human rights to health, security, and physical integrity of women and girls. It has led to severe health complications."[258] This implies that FGM is not just a cultural practice, it is a violation of fundamental human rights, causing both physical harm and long-term social consequences. This reflects how tradition, when unchecked by ethical scrutiny, can perpetuate suffering and inequality, particularly for women and girls.

Descriptive moral relativism recognizes moral beliefs as shaped by cultural context, even when they conflict with universal human rights. In Kilifi County, this is evident in youth whose ethical views are influenced by tradition, poverty, and social expectations. Early and forced marriage remains prevalent in areas like Malindi, Vipingo, Rabai, and Magarini. As Harrison Kivisu notes,, "Early and forced marriages in Kilifi County are particularly prevalent…,"[259] driven by poverty and limited education. A pastoral agent adds, "Young girls are often married off at a young age, sometimes to much older men,"[260] often without their consent. Similarly, ancestral land claims by Mijikenda youth reflect deeply held cultural identities. While valid within their context, such views can create friction with broader values of justice and equality. Cultural relativism helps affirm community values but, if unexamined, may perpetuate practices that undermine dignity.

3.5.2 Meta-Ethical Moral Relativism

Meta-ethical moral relativism centers on the nature and meaning of moral judgments, questioning whether moral statements possess objective truth or are shaped by context. Isidora Stojanovic defines it as "the view that there is no single, absolute, universal morality,"[261] suggesting that moral truth is relative to individual, cultural, or societal frameworks. This challenges the concept of universal moral norms by proposing that what is considered right or wrong varies across contexts. As Andrew Fisher affirms, "questions surrounding the origins of

[258] Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, "Culture, Religion, Legislation and FGM in Kenya," retrieved from https://kippra.or.ke/culture-religion-legislation-and-fgm-in-kenya/ (accessed 12/06/2025).
[259] Harrison Kivisu, "Zamara Foundation Fights Early Marriages in Kilifi, Kwale," retrieved from https://www.thecoast.co.ke/2025/03/28/zamara-foundation-fights-early-marriages-in-kilifi/news/thecoast/8332/19/ (accessed 20/06/2025).
[260] A pastoral agent, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 24/02/2024.
[261] Isidora Stojanovi, "Metaethical Relativism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (eds.), Tristram McPherson & David Plunkett (New York: Routledge, 2018), 119-134, 121.

morality fall within a branch of philosophy known as "metaethics,"[262] a discipline that investigates how moral beliefs are formed, what they mean, and whether they rest on objective foundations or contextual human interpretations. Metaethics differs from normative and applied ethics by asking foundational questions about the meaning and source of moral discourse. It analyzes the language of morality and the extent to which moral truths are anchored in something beyond human thought.

Gilbert Harman, a leading advocate of meta-ethical relativism, identifies two core motivations underlying his view. First, he observes that in order to make a moral judgment, such as whether someone ought to act in a certain way, it is necessary to take into account the moral considerations and reasons to which this person is responsive. Second, he argues that moral behaviour is driven by agent's actions, normally motivated by their attitudes and beliefs about what they ought to do."[263] These insights emphasize that moral reasoning is deeply embedded in personal and cultural contexts, not derived from fixed, universal standards. Harman's position reinforces the idea that morality arises from lived experience and social conditioning, thereby legitimizing ethical pluralism: the coexistence of diverse, and sometimes conflicting, moral systems, each valid within its own interpretive community. Meta-ethics thus provides the philosophical groundwork for understanding the fluidity and contextuality of moral belief across time and cultures.

In Kilifi, youth increasingly navigate a moral landscape shaped by cultural shifts, social influences, and personal perspectives, rather than by objective norms. A pastoral agent observes that "a growing culture of individualism, fueled by a distorted notion of freedom has disrupted traditional family dynamics,"[264] weakening moral formation. This misdirected sense of freedom is reflected in behavioral patterns such as substance abuse, educational disengagement, and sexual promiscuity. Youth increasingly perceive morality as relative and internalize diverse influences, leading to ethical pluralism. Nathan Beresh echoes this concern that, "many young people have largely succeeded in creating a relativistic culture where "… sexual exploration, addiction to drugs, cyberbullying, and other illicit behaviours are the ultimate *telos* that one

[262] Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1 & 10.
[263] Gilbert Harman, "Explaining Value: and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy," retrieved from https://academic.oup.com/book/6588/chapter-abstract/150560292? redirectedfrom=fulltext (accessed 12/02/2025).
[264] A pastoral agent, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 21/02/2024.

ought to strive for."[265] These are challenges among the youth in Kilifi County. As James White notes "One of the defining characteristics of today's youth culture is that they are the first generation in many years to be born into a post-Christian society."[266] These trends challenge the Christian conception of an objective moral order. As Emrys Westacott explains, "…in a relativistic worldview, the idea that 'what is right for you is right for you, and what is right for me is right for me' has negatively impacted the moral life of the youth, leading to moral ambiguity."[267] These insights reflect a broader cultural shift in Kilifi, where subjective morality increasingly overshadows religious and traditional moral anchors.

3.6 Impact of Relativism on the Moral Life of the Youth

Moral relativism has become a prominent trait among youth today, raising serious concerns about its impact on ethical reasoning and behavior. In Kenya's Coastal region particularly Kilifi County, traditional moral frameworks are eroding under the pressure of cultural shifts, economic hardship, and increasing exposure to global influences. Among the Midzi-Chenda people, known for their strong communal ties and cultural heritage, this trend signifies a departure from long-established values and ethical norms. As Moses Ime Aminigo affirms, "Moral health is manifested in individuals when a person becomes capable of understanding the principles of moral conduct and is committed and respectful in his dealings with others."[268] Such moral integrity, however, depends on a community's capacity to uphold and model these principles consistently. The growing prioritization of individual freedom over collective norms is reshaping moral outlooks, especially among youth. As Jonathan Sacks warns, "An individualistic universe may be free, but it is fraught with loneliness, isolation, vulnerability, and nihilism, a prevailing sense of the ultimate meaninglessness of life."[269] In Kilifi, the rise of individualism compounded by unemployment and economic pressure has led many young people to justify unethical behavior as necessary for survival. As Nelson Kazungu explains

[265] Nathan Beresh, "Metaethics: A Conversation between Moral Relativism and Moral Absolutism as it Pertains to Modern Youth Culture," retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/43443991/ https://www.academia.edu/43443991/Metaethics_A_Conversation_between_Moral_Relativism_and_Moral_Absolutism_as_it_Pertains_to_Modern_Youth_Culture (accessed 13/02/2025).
[266] James White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Port-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 49.
[267] Emrys Westacott, "Moral Relativism, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," retrieved from https://iep.utm.edu/moral-relativism/ (accessed 05/10/2024).
[268] George Ime & Unwanaobong Uyanga, "Youth and Moral Values in a Changing Society," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 19, I (2014), 40-44, 41.
[269] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality*, 89.

"Youth rationalize theft, promiscuity behaviours, extremist radicalization, violence, alcoholism and substance abuse, deceit and other unethical actions as necessary, thus altering their ethical baseline."[270] These conditions blur moral boundaries and normalize harmful conduct, contributing to insecurity in the region.

Exposure to global cultures and belief systems through digital media has further transformed the youth's moral landscape. Practices such as "wife-sharing," allegedly occurring in some communities, have affected how some young people perceive relationships and marriage, prioritizing economic gain over trust and fidelity. As discussed in Chapter Two, fieldwork indicated that the normalization of such practices has distorted traditional concepts of family. Jennefer Medza explains: "Due to these practices many young people view marriage as a financial transaction rather than a sacred commitment."[271] This shift undermines the formation of a stable moral foundation and weakens respect for familial unity. Sonia Sikka observes that "Moral relativism has been the cause of erosion of many traditional moral values due to exposure to global cultures through the internet and media, leading to rejection of traditional moral values and solidarity."[272] While technology offers significant benefits such as education, innovation, and connectivity, its misuse has accelerated the rise of individualism and consumerism.

The emphasis on personal autonomy increasingly overrides communal values, eroding social cohesion and shared moral reference points. Sherry Turkle captures this transformation in Alone Together, writing:

> This is the price of radical individualism, massively accelerated by smartphones, social media, and the loss of contexts in which we form enduring moral commitments. Everything has become immediate, transactional, and presentational. We hide behind our profile and become the masks we wear. Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities. It makes us busier than ever and ever more in search of retreat. Gradually, we come to see our online life as life itself.[273]

Turkle's statement suggests that constant engagement with digital platforms has eroded the spaces and relationships where lasting moral convictions once took root. Life increasingly revolves around managing digital identities and instantaneous exchanges, often

[270] Nelson Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 20/01/2024.
[271] Jennefer Medza, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 20/02.2024.
[272] Sonia Sikka, "Moral Relativism and the Concept of Culture," *A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 59, no. 133 (2012): 50-69.
[273] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 13 & 17.

at the expense of reflection, vulnerability, and enduring commitments. What was once private and grounded in real-world values is now shaped by visibility, performance, and immediacy, leaving little room for sustained ethical growth or connection. This environment has challenged traditional frameworks that once provided moral clarity and collective identity. The following subsections will examine how these developments have influenced youth behaviour in Kilifi Deanery.

3.6.1 Cyberbullying and Harassment

The advent of technology has revolutionized communication, transcending geographical barriers and facilitating instantaneous global connectivity. However, cyberbullying and harassment are significant issues affecting the youth in Kilifi County. The anonymity and reach of digital platforms have aggravated these problems, leading to severe emotional and psychological impacts on victims. Kathleen Williams and Nancy Guerra define cyberbullying as "the use of information and communication technology as the means through which to embarrass, threaten, sexually harass, or socially exclude people."[274] The anonymity and perceived distance provided by online platforms has resulted in emotional and psychological harm for victims, creating a hostile online environment and eroding the values of respect and empathy. It has encouraged individuals to engage in bullying or harassment without facing immediate consequences among the youth.

Helen Cowie explains that, "cyberbullying is done through repeatedly sending insulting or threatening messages, threats of harm or intimidation, spreading cruel rumours or put-downs, pretending to be someone else to damage person's reputation, and revealing personal information shared in confidence."[275] These forms of cyberbullying have led to severe emotional distress and long-term psychological effects on the victims. Many perpetrators today have turned their attention to technology, including mobile telephones and the internet, as a powerful means of exerting power and control over others and even defrauding them to get money.

[274] Kathleen Williams & Nancy Guerra, "Prevalence and Predictors of Internet Bullying," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 41, no. 6, Supplement (2007): S14–S21.
[275] Helen Cowie, "Cyberbullying and its Impact on Young People's Emotional Health and Well-being," *The Psychiatrist journal*, Vol. 37, 5 (2013): 167 – 170.

3.6.2 Online Radicalization

Kilifi County is a hotspot for youth radicalization, as seen earlier. Online influences have been depicted as significant drivers for the propagation and adoption of extremist ideologies, which often contain an element of collective grievance and subsequent acts of violence. Jens Binder and Jonathan Kenyon state, "Online radicalization is understood as a process during which individuals get exposed to, imitate and internalize extremist beliefs and attitudes, utilizing the internet, in particular social media, and other forms of online communication."[276] Extremist groups use online platforms to recruit and radicalize young people, exploiting their vulnerabilities and disillusionment. This kind of behaviour has led to the spread of radical ideologies and involvement in extremist activities among the youth. This issue has pose significant challenges to individuals and community safety in coastal regions.

3.6.3 Addiction to Digital Media

Technology is an integral part of our lives in many aspects. Today, smartphones have become a constant companion for many of people. However, excessive and compulsive use of the internet or online activities has increasingly led to negative consequences. James Sherer writes that, "Technology addiction can potentially involve various forms of online activity including social media, gaming that are cultic, gambling, online pornography, youth radicalization."[277] The unchecked use of smartphones and social media is addictive, especially to young people. Youth spend an inordinate amount of time online neglecting real-world responsibilities and relationships. This behaviour has resulted in poor academic performance and exam cheating. James Kariuki writes, "Despite various efforts being put in place to try to curb the problem of cheating in the secondary education examinations, the vice is still rampant in Kilifi and other parts of Kenya."[278] Moreover, digital devices have altered family social dynamics, leading to family breakdown and decreased physical family relationships.

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[276] Jens Binder & Jonathan Kenyon, "Terrorism and the Internet: How Dangerous is Online Radicalization?" retrieved from https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9606324/ (accessed 15/11/2024).

[277] James Sherer, "Technology Addictions: Social Media, Online Gaming, and More," retrieved from https://www.psychiatry.org/Patients-Families/Technology-Addictions-Social-Media-and-more (accessed 15/11/2024).

[278] James Kariuki, Factors Influencing Cheating Behaviour In Examinations Among Secondary School Students In Kilifi District, Kenya," retrieved from http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/96221 (accessed 15/11/2024).

For the youth in Kilifi County, it has created superficial relationships whereby they engage more in online friendships based on likes, comments, and shares, rather than deep, meaningful interactions. The addiction has contributed to moral ambiguity and relativistic thinking. The exposure to various moral perspectives online has created a clash of ethical standards. Youth adopt relativistic views where moral values are seen as subjective and situational. This has undermined the development of a stable moral framework, making it difficult for them to make consistent and principled ethical decisions.

3.6.4 Transactional Relationships

Kendra Cherry defines a transactional relationship as "one where each person does things for the other expecting to get something in return. Each person is willing to help the other if the favour is returned immediately or later."[279] These relationships prioritize mutual benefit over authentic emotional bonds. When individuals engage with others solely for reciprocal advantage, trust deteriorates, weakening the social fabric. Robert Hall, in his book, *This Land of Stranger*, notes that "relationships are the most valuable and value-creating resource of any society. They are our lifelines to survive, grow and thrive. In place of the 'we,' we have been left with the 'me,' the solitary individual, whose needs, wants, and desires take precedence over the collective. Human society has evolved to a stage where the rights of the individual, particularly those with wealth, power, and status, supersede all other rights and responsibilities."[280] This shift from collective responsibility to individualism undermines meaningful human connections and fosters a self-centered culture. In such an environment, interpersonal bonds become tools for personal gain rather than vehicles for mutual growth and understanding.

The prevalence of transactional thinking has also significantly affected the job market. Youth, particularly in marginalized regions such as Kilifi County, are vulnerable to exploitative labor conditions. Limited employment opportunities compel many to accept underpaid or insecure jobs, while others feel pressured to engage in corrupt practices, including bribery, to secure work. These patterns reinforce a culture of moral relativism, where ethical standards fluctuate based on personal interest. To counter this trend, it is essential to cultivate moral

[279] Kendra Cherry, "Transactional Relationships: The Link between Reciprocity and Connection," retrieved from https://www.verywellmind.com/transactional-relationships-8580613 (accessed 15/11/2024).
[280] Robert Hall, "This Land of Strangers: The Relationship Crisis that Imperils Home, Work, Politics, and Faith, Greenleaf," retrieved from https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/this-land-of-strangers-the-relationship-crisis-that-imperils-home-work-politics-and-faith (accessed 14/11/2024).

reasoning among young people, fostering values rooted in integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. By promoting ethical awareness and community-oriented thinking, young people can be empowered to resist exploitative systems and contribute to a more equitable society.

3.7 The Constitutive Elements of Morality of Human Acts

The morality of human acts is determined by various interrelated elements that guide ethical discernment. Pope John Paul II affirms, "Acting is morally good when the choices of freedom are in conformity with man's true good and thus, express the voluntary ordering of the person towards his ultimate end: God himself, the supreme good in whom all people find their full and perfect happiness."[281] Attaining happiness thus necessitates engaging in acts that lead toward this ultimate good. Thomas Aquinas views the human act as:

> A power-exercise: One active and the other passive. Both are related, such that the active power exercise endows the passive one with its end-directedness. Investigation of the human act pertains to moral philosophy, investigating whether a given human act is good by being conducive to human happiness, our ultimate end. The subject matter of moral philosophy is, very generally, the "human act ordered to the end.[282]

Aquinas thought bridges philosophy and theology, seeking to evaluate the goodness of human actions relative to the final end, true happiness. His framework intersects deeply with moral theology, especially in examining how free will and rationality inform ethical decision-making. Alan Padgett underscores this interplay, asserting that "although theology and philosophy are both rigorous academic disciplines, they also speak to that which is beyond academics. Philosophy engages in the quest for ultimate truth through reason, logic, and practical evidence, while theology builds upon philosophical insights to seek a deeper understanding of ultimate truth through divine revelation, faith, and spiritual experiences."[283] This synthesis offers a robust foundation for resisting moral relativism, which often reduces morality to personal or cultural preference. Essential here is distinguishing human acts from acts of man. Karl Peschke defines human acts (actus humanis) as "actions that proceed from insight into the nature and purpose of one doing and from the consent of the free will. They are to be distinguished from

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[281] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 85 (1993), 1133-1228, no. 72.

[282] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 6, prologue (Leon. ed., vol. 6, p. 55); Cf. Can Laurens Löwe, *Thomas Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Human Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 36.

[283] Alan G. Padgett, "The Relationship between Theology and Philosophy: Constructing a Christian Worldview," in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology* (eds.), James Beilby (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 25–44, 26 & 27.

acts of man (*actus hominis)* performed without the intention of intellect and free will."[284] Examples of acts of man are digestion, growth, scratching oneself, flow of blood in the veins. These acts are not under the control of human will.

So, since human acts proceed from insight and free will, and they are ordered to the end, the interplay between responsibility and freedom is crucial in ethical decision-making. Peschke notes, "An action is responsible if it is not the result of any force but of a person's deliberate and free decision..."[285] Responsibility ensures that our actions consider the consequences they may have on ourselves and others, while freedom allows us to make choices and pursue our desires without undue constraint. Aquinas similarly grounds freedom in rational nature, asserting:

> True freedom is the ability to act under our nature as rational creatures and to choose the good freely. Reason is crucial to our freedom because it enables us to discern good and choose it freely. Law is also necessary for our freedom because it provides guidance and direction. Finally, grace is the gift of God's love and mercy that enables us to act freely and choose the good in a way consistent with our nature. Freedom is not simply the ability to choose between different options. Instead, freedom is the capacity to choose what is good and to act on that choice. Freedom is the ability to act rationally, which is oriented towards good.[286]

Without freedom, we cannot be truly responsible for our actions, as we would not have the autonomy to choose otherwise. Conversely, freedom without responsibility can lead to actions that harm ourselves and others. The choices we make should define us as autonomous, rational human beings guided by the devine law. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "divine and natural law shows mankind the way to follow to practice the good and attain his end…"[287] Since human acts are characterized by their intentionality and purpose, they are directed towards an end, which the individual perceives as sound. This intentionality gives human actions their moral quality, making them subject to moral evaluation as morally good or evil. The Catechism further teaches: "morality of human acts depends on the object chosen, the intention, and the circumstance of the action. These make up the sources or constitutive elements of the morality of human acts."[288] The object must be intrinsically good, the intention oriented toward a just end,

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[284] Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican: General Moral Theology, Revised Edition* (India: Theological Publications, 1993), 247.
[285] Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II, Volume I: General Moral Theology, Revised Edition*, 66.
[286] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 1; I–II, q. 6, pr.; I–II, q. 91, a. 2; I–II, q. 109, a. 2.
[287] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), no. 1954.
[288] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1750.

and the circumstances appropriate and not corruptive. If any element is morally deficient, the act as a whole is ethically evil. Acts such as murder are intrinsically evil and impermissible regardless of motive or context, as they violate the moral order. Conversely, the legitimate use of force in self-defense may be morally justified. This judgment is guided by the Principle of Just War Theory, which applies the same moral principles: object, intention, and circumstance to decisions involving armed conflict.

The Principles of Just War Theory: This regards when war may be permissible. Just War Theory is grounded in both moral philosophy and Catholic moral teaching through a shared commitment to ethical reasoning, justice, and the dignity of human life, even in the context of armed conflict. The Catechism of the Catholic Church incorporates this doctrine, emphasizing that the decision to go to war must meet strict moral conditions to be considered legitimate, especially when invoking self-defense. When analyzing whether war or self-defense is morally justified, it falls squarely within *jus ad bellum*[289] (the right to war) as part of the broader Just War Doctrine. Key to this understanding is the Church's teaching on respect for human life. The Church directs our attention to the Ten Commandments. It is important to note that the question is not what I think about war or what you think, or what anyone else things. The question is what God thinks about war as the Creator of the world and the Lord of every human soul. God alone has the right to speak authoritatively about war among men and nations on earth.

The Fifth Commandment of God states, "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13). This is non-negotiable since God forbids killing, nobody has any right to think of war as a means of bringing about his own will, or the will of his own nation. War means killing and killing is forbidden. Reinforcing this, Church teaching affirms, "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator"[290] Conversely, it also acknowledges the complexity of international relations, teaching that "All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war. However, "as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all

[289] *Jus ad bellum* is a Latin word meaning "the right to war." It refers to the set of moral and legal principles that determine when it is justifiable for a state to resort to armed force. In other words, it governs whether going to war can be morally or legally permitted in the first place.
[290] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2258.

peace efforts have failed.[291] This teaching emphasizes a dual responsibility: first, a collective duty to pursue peace and prevent conflict; and second, a conditional allowance for nations to protect themselves when peaceful solutions have been exhausted and no higher global authority is able to guarantee security.

While the Church upholds peace as the ideal, it acknowledges that in a flawed and vulnerable world, a nation may morally defend itself against aggression if all other avenues have failed. Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

> The damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain; all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; there must be serious prospects of success; the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition. These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the "just war" doctrine. The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.[292]

Both the Principles of "Just War Theory" and the constitutive elements of the morality of human acts are intrinsically connected. The Just War Doctrine is essentially an application of the moral framework used to evaluate any human act, specifically, the framework to the deeply consequential decision of going to war. The three constitutive elements of a morally good human act: object, intention, and circumstance, closely align with the ethical criteria used in *jus ad bellum* within Just War Theory. This correspondence shows how Catholic moral teaching applies universal moral principles to the decision-making process surrounding the justification of war.

3.7.1 The Object

A human act is moral insofar as it is subject to reason and oriented toward a proper end. The object of a moral act, as described by Peschke is "that effect which an action primarily and directly causes (*finis operis*). It is always and necessarily the result of the act, independent of any circumstances or the agent's intention."[293] Object is the moral content of the act itself, what the

[291] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2308.
[292] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2309.
[293] Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: General Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, 263.

act is in its very nature. For an action to be ethically valid, its object must be inherently good, apart from the intention of the agent or the surrounding circumstances. For instance, youth engagement in Kilifi County in activities such as tree planting and environmental education serves as an example of morally good objects. These actions directly contribute to ecological preservation and communal well-being, affirming their ethical soundness. In contrast, the targeting and killing of elderly individuals based on witchcraft accusations represents an object that is intrinsically evil. Regardless of intention or social context, such acts violate human dignity and the moral order, revealing a deeper ethical breakdown influenced by superstition and relativism.

3.7.2 The End Intended by the Agent

The end of a human act refers to the purpose or motive behind it—the reason why the agent chooses to act. As Peschke explains, "The end (*finis operantis*) is why the agent undertakes an act. The agent acts for the sake of this end, which he expects or hopes to be the act effects. The end can be defined as the effect the agent subjectively aims at in his action."[294] While an indifferent act may acquire moral value depending on the agent's intention, a good purpose cannot justify an act that is evil in itself. For example, giving alms with a hidden motive to seduce, or stealing money to help the poor, corrupts the act despite seemingly good intentions. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "The end does not justify the means. There are concrete acts that are always wrong to choose. One may not do evil so that good may result from it."[295] This underscores that ethical integrity requires both morally upright means and ends. Echoing this, Kenneth Baker reminds us "Man achieves his eternal destiny and eternal salvation by doing good and avoiding evil."[296] Peschke further clarifies that "A good end can make better an act good in its object; it can make good an act indifferent in its object; and it can make less evil an act evil in its object… Yet, if the good or evil end intended by the agent is identical with the good or evil object of the act, no further goodness or badness is added to the act."[297] This

[294] Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: General Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II,* 267.
[295] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1759-1761.
[296] Kenneth Baker, "What Makes Human Acts Good or Bad?" retrieved https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/what-makes-human-acts-good-or-bad.html (accessed 29/08/2024).
[297] Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: General Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II,* 267-268.

ethical framework is essential in guiding individuals, such as the youth in Kilifi County toward responsible moral decision-making.

3.7.3 The Circumstances

Circumstances constitute the third element in evaluating the morality of a human act. As Peschke states, they are "particulars of the concrete human act which are not necessarily connected with its object. The circumstances are such things as the person involved, the time, the place, the occasion, which are distinct from the object..."[298] Peschke's point is that circumstances are external factors that surround an action but don't define its core nature. Instead, they influence how morally serious the action is and how responsible the person is for it. They help us understand the context in which a decision was made without changing what the action actually is. Thomas Aquinas elaborates this by identifying factors such as who, what, where, how, with what means, why, and when,[299] all of which shape the moral context of an action. These elements do not define the act itself but underscore that the full moral weight of an action depends on the surrounding details, which clarify its seriousness and the actor's responsibility. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "circumstances are secondary elements that can affect the morality of an act by altering the degree of responsibility or the severity of the act."[300] Thus, while circumstances cannot render an intrinsically evil act good, they are crucial in assessing moral accountability and the gravity of the action.

For the sake of understanding how the three constitutive elements of a human act—object, intention, and circumstance are used in moral evaluation, one can turn to the recent extrajudicial killings in Kenya, including the death of Albert Ojwang. These acts expose a profound moral crisis that, when examined through this framework, are clearly unjust: the object (the killing of innocent persons) is intrinsically evil; the intention (whether repression, retaliation, or political control) is morally disordered; and the circumstances (targeting unarmed, often peaceful youth protesters) intensify the gravity of the act. When viewed alongside Just War Theory, which demands just cause, right intention, proportionality, and last resort, the illegitimacy of such force in domestic governance is further underscored. Together, these frameworks unambiguously

[298] Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, 266.
[299] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a-2ae, q. 7, a. 3.
[300] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1754.

affirm that such violence violates moral law, human dignity, and the common good, calling for ethical accountability and restorative justice.

3.7.4 Moral Significance of the External Act

The moral value of human actions is not limited to internal intentions but is vividly revealed through their external expression. This outward act reflects the internal moral choice and serves as a bridge between personal conscience and societal impact. Understanding the external act is therefore essential for evaluating ethical behaviour. The three constitutive elements are key to this evaluation, especially in shaping morally responsible youth. As Duarte Sousa-Lara notes, in Aquinas's philosophy, "the external acts refer to the physical actions performed by a person, as opposed to the internal acts of the will, such as intentions and choices."[301] Grasping both aspects is vital for a full understanding of moral responsibility.

In Kilifi County, external acts significantly contribute to moral relativism among the youth. Kenga Kazungu observes that "exposure to diverse cultural norms through media, education, and cross-cultural interaction has rendered many values subjective and context-dependent. Modern lifestyles have diluted traditional moral structures; practices once considered taboo, such as premarital relationships, same-sex unions, and relaxed dress codes, are increasingly normalized, leading to a shifting moral landscape."[302] Moreover, peer pressure has been a driving force behind youth radicalization and affiliation with extremist groups. Coupled with economic hardships and social exclusion, Kazungu further explains that, "many youth justify unethical behavior as a necessary response to their environment."[303] Together, these factors have fostered a climate of moral uncertainty, eroding the objective understanding of right and wrong.

3.8 The Principle Methods of Assessing Human Acts

To evaluate the morality of human actions, various ethical theories have evolved, each grounded in distinct philosophical traditions aimed at informing and guiding moral behavior. As Peter Oluoch defines it, a theory is "a formal idea or set of ideas intended to explain something,

[301] Duarte Sousa-Lara, "Aquinas on Interior and Exterior Acts: Clarifying a Key Aspect of His Action Theory," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (2008): 277-316, 279.
[302] Kenga Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 21/02/2024.
[303] Kenga Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 21/02/2024.

offering a rational explanation of cause and effect among observable phenomena."[304] In the context of moral theology, such theories provide critical frameworks for explaining why particular actions are morally offensive or why certain behaviours ought to be pursued. Given the breadth of ethical thought, this study will concentrate on four principal theories: deontology, consequentialism, virtue ethics, and communitarianism, which will offer coherent and systematic approaches to assessing moral acts. These methodologies, rooted in philosophical inquiry, serve as essential tools for cultivating ethical awareness and responsibility, especially among the youth.

3.8.1 Deontology (Duty-Based Ethics)

At its core, deontology urges individuals to act not out of self-interest or preference, but from an inner commitment to do what is morally right. Joseph Kranak writes that "the name 'deontology' comes from the Greek word deon, meaning duty or obligation."[305] As a normative ethical theory, deontology identifies actions as morally required, forbidden, or permitted, offering a system for evaluating what we ought to do. Sondra Rueter defines it as "an ethical theory that emphasizes the moral obligation to follow certain rules, regardless of the outcome,"[306] grounded in the belief that some actions are inherently right or wrong. Central to deontology is the work of Emmanuel Kant. Kranak notes, "One of the distinctive features of Kant's ethics is that it focuses on duties, defined by right and wrong. Right actions are the ones we ought to do and wrong actions we ought not to do."[307] For Kant, morality is anchored in rational obligation rather than emotional motivation or consequences. He argues that we are morally bound to certain actions because reason identifies them as right, not because they serve personal benefit. Kant's ethics thus poses the question: "Is this action right in itself?" rather than "What good might come of it?"

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[304] Peter Oluoch Okoth, *Biomedical Moral Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2015), 18.

[305] Joseph Kranak, "Kantian Deontology," retrieved from https://press.rebus.community/intro-to-phil-ethics/chapter/kantian-deontology/ (accessed 22/06/2025).

[306] Sondra Rueter, Deontology "Understanding Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism and Deontology," retrieved from https://www.philosophos.org/ethicsdeontology#:~:text=Deontology%20has%20been%20heavily%20influenced%20 (accessed 05/11/2024).

[307] Joseph Kranak, "Kantian Deontology," retrieved from https://press.rebus.community/intro-to-phil-ethics/chapter/kantian-deontology/ (accessed 22/06/2025).

In Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant draws a critical distinction between two types of imperatives. A hypothetical imperative, he explains, "a hypothetical imperative represents the practical necessity of an action as a means to achieving something else that one wills. A hypothetical imperative is a contingent command. It is conditional on a person's wants, needs, or desires …"[308] For example, "If you want to do well on a test, then you should study." This type of imperative governs practical reasoning, not moral duty. Within the context of youth behavior in Kilifi County, this concept is vividly illustrated. As Jane Kazo reports, "many youth turn to drug use primarily due to peer pressure and the need to feel accepted."[309] The choice to use drugs, then, becomes a hypothetical imperative, conditioned by the desire for social belonging, not guided by ethical reasoning. Kantian ethics would critique this decision as lacking moral substance, since it is rooted in external motivations rather than adherence to a universal moral law. In contrast, Kant articulates the categorical imperative as a principle that compels action unconditionally. He states:

> Categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end …the absolute good will's self-legislation in analogy to the laws of nature, … universally valid; and laws which must be obeyed, that is, must be followed, even in opposition to inclination…There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely: "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.[310]

This command directs individuals to test the morality of their actions by asking whether the guiding principle could be universally applied without contradiction. It is a morality based on principle, not emotion, utility, or popularity but respect to human dignity. Kant holds that, dignity… refers to the status of persons as ends in themselves that must be respected in all choice. It is a value that is above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent, a value that cannot be quantified."[311] Thus, even in hardship, one must act from duty. Examples of categorical imperatives include: "You should not kill," "You ought to help those in need," and "Do not steal." These are not contingent on personal aims; they are moral necessities. As Sondra Rueter affirms, "Emmanuel Kant and William David Ross have heavily influenced deontology and their deontological ethics is based on duty or obligation. Kant argued that one should respect

[308] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 414.
[309] Jane Kazo, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 23/02/2024.
[310] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), 30 & 421.
[311] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 434.

the autonomy of others by allowing them to make decisions based on their values and beliefs. On the other hand, Ross asserts that some actions are intrinsically right or wrong regardless of their consequences."[312] Both philosophers offer frameworks for ethical decision-making grounded in duty. While Kant assesses moral permissibility through universal law, Ross emphasizes fidelity to one's obligations. In either case, deontology affirms that telling the truth, keeping promises, and respecting life are moral duties, not because they yield favorable outcomes, but because they are inherently just.

A discussion of deontology offers the youth in Kilifi Deanery a powerful ethical lens through which to evaluate their choices, not based on convenience or peer pressure, but on unwavering principles of moral duty. In a context where social belonging and external influence often drive behaviour, especially in challenges such as drug use or dishonesty, deontology challenges young people to rise above fleeting desires and instead act from inner conviction. Kant's notion of the categorical imperative encourages them to ask, "Can my actions serve as a universal law?" This question inspires integrity, empathy, and respect for others' dignity. It affirms that truthfulness, respect for life, and standing by one's commitments are not just admirable traits, but moral obligations, regardless of the outcome. By internalizing this mindset, the youth in Kilifi County can foster a culture of responsibility, resilience, and ethical leadership, where doing what is right becomes not just a choice, but a personal duty that uplifts both self and society.

3.8.2 Consequentialism (Outcome-Based Ethics)

Consequentialism is an ethical theory grounded in the belief that the moral value of an action is determined solely by its consequences. As Benjamin Spall defines it, it is "a type of normative ethical theory in its purest form that maintains that the moral quality of an action is completely determined by its consequences."[313] This result-oriented framework evaluates actions based on the goodness they produce, often emphasizing the maximization of overall happiness or well-being. Closely related to this outcome-centered outlook is proportionalism, an ethical theory that integrates aspects of both consequentialism and deontological ethics. As articulated by

[312] Sondra Rueter, Deontology "Understanding Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism and Deontology," retrieved from https://www.philosophos.org/ethicsdeontology#:~:text=Deontology%20has%20been%20heavily%20influenced%20 (accessed 05/11/2024).
[313] Benjamin Spall, "When Do the Ends Justify the Means?" retrieved from https://benjaminspall.com/ends-means/ (accessed 14/10/2024).

Bernard Hoose, "it is an ethical theory that seeks a balance between natural law and situation ethics, allowing for moral flexibility based on proportionate reasons"[314] in real-life contexts. While acknowledging the authority of Natural Law, proportionalism permits exceptions when adherence to moral rules would produce significant harm. It maintains that context matters and moral evaluation requires sensitivity to particular circumstances.

At its core, proportionalism holds that moral rules derived from Natural Law are generally binding but may be overridden in exceptional situations if a proportionate reason exists. It does not reject traditional moral teachings but challenges rigid interpretations, particularly when they risk causing greater harm. Hoose's framework prompts a shift from absolutist thinking toward discernment: rather than assert "never lie" or "always tell the truth," the proportionalist asks what is morally appropriate in light of all relevant factors. As he explains "a good act aligns with the moral rules of Natural Law, while a right act may involve breaking those rules if doing so results in the lesser of two evils."[315] This distinction lies at the heart of proportionalist reasoning. This outlook resonates with the ethical structure in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, particularly in *Prima Secundae* (I–II), Questions 18–21. Aquinas insists that "moral actions must not only align with the object of the act but also with the agent's intention and the surrounding circumstances."[316]

Aquinas maintains that "moral goodness depends not only on the action itself (object) but also on the intention (end) and circumstances surrounding it … An action to be morally good, all three aspects must align with reason and the natural moral order."[317] Though Aquinas upholds moral absolutes, his emphasis on intention and context provided the conceptual groundwork for later ethical developments. This foundation is further developed in Aquinas's Doctrine of Double Effect, as articulated in *Secunda Secundae* (II–II), Question 64, Article 7. In discussing the lawfulness of killing in self-defense, he writes:

[314] Bernard Hoose "Proportionalism," retrieved from https://docslib.org/doc/7582004/bernard-hoose-proportionalism (accessed 23/06/2025).
[315] Bernard Hoose, "*Proportionalism: The American Debate and its European Roots,*" retrieved from https://quizlet.com/gb/911448491/4e-bernard-hooses-overview-of-the-proportionalist-debate-flash-cards/ (accessed 23/06/2025).
[316] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 18, a. 4
[317] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, qq. 18–21.

> Nothing hinders one act from having two effects, only one of which is intended, while the other is beside the intention. … Accordingly, the act of self-defense may have two effects: the saving of one's own life, and the killing of the aggressor. … Therefore, this act, since one's intention is to save one's own life, is not unlawful, seeing that it is natural to everything to keep itself in 'being,' as far as possible.[318]

Aquinas lays the groundwork for what later theologians would formalize as the Principle of Double Effect, that "an action with both a good and a bad effect can be morally permissible if: first, the act itself is morally good or neutral, Second, the bad effect is not intended, third, The good effect is not achieved by means of the bad effect, fourth, There is a proportionately grave reason for permitting the bad effect."[319] This principle is now central in Catholic moral theology, providing clarity in situations where outcomes are morally complex. A vivid field example emerged during our research at a government clinic in Kilifi County. Joyce Mwariga (not her real name), a clinical officer, described an emergency involving a pregnant woman in obstructed labor. With no ambulance available, the only transport option was a government motorcycle designated solely for administrative use. She stated, "I knew I was not supposed to use it," she said, "but waiting could have cost two lives."[320] Joyce broke protocol and transported the patient, saving both mother and child. This case exemplifies the Principle of Double Effect: the intended good (saving lives) outweighed the unintended consequence (policy violation), and the decision was morally defensible given the proportionate urgency.

While Aquinas's framework safeguards the moral structure of Natural Law, proportionalism adapts his insights with greater flexibility. It permits morally ambiguous actions if the resulting good significantly outweighs the harm. In this way, it diverges from Aquinas's stricter absolutism by granting priority to compassionate outcomes in ethically fraught situations. Another compelling field account supports this view. Maureen Juma, an education advocate in Kikambala, described the push for school re-entry programs for teenage mothers initiatives often met with resistance from traditional leaders fearing moral decay. Maureen defended the programs: "These girls deserve a second chance,"[321] she emphasized, framing the initiative as a restoration of dignity and a path out of poverty. From a proportionalist stance, this approach, though controversial, upholds the greater moral good. It captures the core of proportionalist

[318] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q. 64, a. 7
[319] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q. 64, a. 7.
[320] Joyce Mwariga, clinical officer at a government clinic in Kilifi County, interviewed by researcher, at Kilifi, 23/02/2024.
[321] Maureen Juma, interview by the researcher, at Kilifi, 24/02/2024.

ethics: that human flourishing may sometimes require stepping beyond rigid norms to act rightly in a particular context. Among the various strands of consequentialist thought, two influential perspectives: utilitarianism and hedonism, offer distinct yet complementary insights into how ethical decisions are evaluated through the lens of outcomes.

3.8.2.1 Utilitarianism: The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number

Utilitarianism was pioneered by Jeremy Bentham and refined by John Stuart Mill, is a major strand of consequentialist ethics that assesses morality based on the promotion of overall well-being. Jeremy Bentham, its classical founder, introduced the principle of utility, defining right action as that which produces "the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain,"[322] treating all pleasures as equal in kind. John Stuart Mill, while building on Bentham's framework, refined the theory by emphasizing quality over quantity of pleasure. He argued that intellectual and moral pleasures are superior, famously stating, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."[323] Mill defines utilitarianism as "a consequentialist argument that states that the right action is the one which produces the greatest amount of utility,"[324] underscoring the value of higher pleasures and human development. This focus on maximizing benefit for the greatest number makes utilitarianism especially relevant in contexts like healthcare, education, and public policy, where ethical choices often require balancing complex social needs.

According to Staff Writers, "The theory of utilitarianism falls into the category [of] consequentialism because the benefit of decisions is the biggest factor… The moral worth of an action is determined by its consequences and the amount of happiness it produces for the greatest number of people."[325] This ethical emphasis on collective well-being is reflected in Niccolò Machiavelli's assertion that "the end justifies the means,"[326] a viewpoint that resonates with recent events in Kenya. Generation Z protesters, motivated by corruption, police brutality, and

[322] This vs. That, "Bentham's Utilitarianism vs. Mill's Utilitarianism – What's the Difference?" retrieved from ttps://thisvsthat.io/that-vs-this (accessed 23/06/2025).
[323] This vs. That, "Bentham's Utilitarianism vs. Mill's Utilitarianism – What's the Difference?" retrieved from ttps://thisvsthat.io/that-vs-this (accessed 23/06/2025).
[324] This vs. That, "Bentham's Utilitarianism vs. Mill's Utilitarianism – What's the Difference?" retrieved from ttps://thisvsthat.io/that-vs-this (accessed 23/06/2025).
[325] Staff Writer, "What Are the Four Major Ethical Theories?" retrieved from https://www.reference.com/world-view/four-major-ethical-theories-fe06344fe488fa54 (accessed 15/10/2024).
[326] Niccolò Machiavelli, "Accepted Interpretation of Machiavelli's "the ends justify the means," retrieved from https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/2276 (accessed 17/10/2024).

economic inequality, employed civil disobedience to challenge the 2024 Finance Bill. Though disruptive, Gabrielle Lync notes, "The immediate goal of rejecting the 2024 Finance Bill and addressing systemic issues could justify the disruptive methods used"[327] The resulting withdrawal of the bill and greater governmental accountability illustrate how consequentialist reasoning can legitimize such actions when the broader good is served.

This moral framework also finds expression in Kilifi County, where consequentialist ethics particularly utilitarianism are influencing youth empowerment strategies. As youth counselor Miriam Juma observed in our field research, "the growing implementation of school re-entry programs for teenage mothers [are] initiatives that often meet resistance from traditional gatekeepers concerned about eroding cultural values."[328] Yet the long-term benefits, reducing poverty, expanding education, and fostering self-reliance, reflect the utilitarian goal of maximizing positive outcomes. Miriam recounted how young mothers who returned to school gained new aspirations and economic independence, positively affecting their families and communities. She powerfully concluded, "When you give a girl her education back, you are lifting generations."[329] Her account captures how ethically justified decisions, even when contested, can shape a more just and flourishing future for Kilifi's youth.

3.8.2.2 Hedonism: Pleasure as the Foundation of Moral Value

Hedonism is a value theory that identifies pleasure as the highest intrinsic good and pain as the greatest intrinsic evil. The word 'hedonism' comes from the ancient Greek for 'pleasure.' As a strand within consequentialist ethics, it evaluates actions based on the degree to which they increase pleasure or reduce suffering. In its ethical form, hedonism maintains that the moral worth of an action is determined by its ability to maximize pleasurable experiences. Jeremy Bentham asserted that, "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain, and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do."[330] Bentham believed ethics is not about abstract principles or

[327] Gabrielle Lync, "Kenya has changed": The Gen-Z protests and what they mean," retrieved from https://democracyinafrica.org/kenya-has-changed-the-gen-z-protests-and-what-they-mean/ (accessed 18/10/2024).
[328] Miriam Juma, interviewed by the researcher, at Kilifi, 25/02/2024.
[329] Miriam Juma, interviewed by the researcher, at Kilifi, 25/02/2024.
[330] Jeremy Bentham, "Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," retrieved from https://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/bentham/ipml/ipml.c01.html (accessed 23/06/2025).

divine commands, it is about outcomes that increase happiness and reduce suffering. In general, pleasure is understood below, as including all pleasant feeling or experience:

> Contentment, delight, ecstasy, elation, enjoyment, euphoria, exhilaration, exultation, gladness, gratification, gratitude, joy, liking, love, relief, satisfaction... Pain or displeasure is understood as including all unpleasant experience or feeling such as ache, agitation, agony, anguish, annoyance, anxiety, boredom dejection, depression, desolation, despair, desperation, discomfort, discontentment, disgust, dislike, dismay, disorientation, dissatisfaction, distress, enmity, ennui, fear, gloominess, grief, guilt, hatred, horror, hurting, irritation, loathing, remorse, resentment, sadness, shame, sorrow, suffering,…[331]

Within the framework of this study, hedonism serves as a critical lens through which the youth of Kilifi Deanery can examine the ethical implications of pursuing pleasure and the resultant consequences. As a value theory that emphasizes maximizing enjoyment and avoiding pain, hedonism resonates strongly with adolescents navigating the emotional and social pressures of daily life. Joan Katana, a youth moderator, aptly highlights this reality by noting that "a teenager might skip school to attend a beach party because it promises immediate joy,"[332] a scenario that is increasingly common among youth in the region. Such choices, often driven by peer influence and the desire for instant gratification, frequently undermine educational commitments and long-term aspirations. By exploring hedonism not merely as a philosophical theory but as a mirror of lived experience, young people are challenged to reflect on the quality of pleasure they pursue and to prioritize forms of happiness that cultivate growth, resilience, and community well-being.

3.8.3 Communitarianism (Family-Based Ethics)

Human beings are inherently social, born into families, clans, communities, and nations. There is no individual without the community; it is the social context that forms the foundation of moral judgments and ethical identity. These communities, whether familial, neighborhood-based, or cultural shape people's values, beliefs, and behaviors through shared norms and collective experiences. Referring to Bujo, Sesana and Aina affirm:

[331] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Hedonism," retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hedonism/ (accessed 23/06/2025).
[332] Joan Katana, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 22/02/2024.

> In communitarian African ethics, decisions are made considering their impact on the entire community, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity. He argues for an African moral theology grounded in communitarian logic, built around the concept of "palaver," a communal dialogue to resolve conflicts and make ethical decisions. This process involves open discussion and consensus-building within the community. It is in the community meetings where members collectively discuss and resolve issues, ensuring everyone's voice is heard. According to Bujo, keeping the ancestors' memory alive helps inspire the present and prepare the future generation via anamnesis, a 'communal conscience' that is the highest court for moral decisions.[333]

Bujo emphasizes that African ethics prioritize community-centered morality over individual autonomy. In African thought, moral integrity is evaluated based on one's contribution to communal harmony and the common good. This outlook highlights the interconnectedness of individuals and the moral significance of relationships, mutual support, and shared responsibility. Bujo advocates for a moral framework that reflects African cultural heritage and addresses the unique social dynamics of the continent. His communitarian model provides a robust means of navigating ethical dilemmas by honoring the collective welfare of society. Communitarianism offers a counterbalance to individualism by reinforcing the significance of community and social cohesion. It aims to harmonize individual rights with collective responsibilities, thereby safeguarding the well-being of the entire society. In this context, the Ubuntu philosophy offers a rich parallel.

As Jacob Rugare Mugumbate and Rodreck Mupedziswa explain, "Ubuntu is an overarching philosophy… Different communities emphasize different aspects of the philosophy, but a common foundation shapes relations, knowledge, values and practices."[334] In this study, Ubuntu is employed interchangeably with communitarianism, representing a worldview in African ethics from which relational, societal, environmental, and spiritual values are drawn. Stanlake John Thompson Samkange and Tommie Marie Samkange describe Ubuntu as an

[333] Raymond Olu Sesana & Raymond Aina, "Bénézet Bujo and Paulinus Odozor on Morality Truly African Truly Christian: An Evaluation of An Ongoing Conversation," retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/38981880/B%C3%89N%C3%89zet_Bujo_and_Paulinus_Odozor_on_Morality_Truly_African_Truly_Christian_an_Evaluation_of_An_Ongoing_Conversation (accessed 18/01/2024).

[334] Jacob Rugare Mugumbate & Rodreck Mupedziswa (eds.), "Understanding Ubuntu and its contribution to social work education in Africa and other regions of the world," retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2023.2168638#abstract (accessed 01/11/2024).

"Indigenous African philosophy whose three aspects are humanity, the sanctity of life, and people-centred status."[335] Lovemore Mbigi echoes this, stating:

> Although African cultures display awesome diversity, they also show remarkable similarities. Community is the cornerstone of African thought and life and the most important aspect of Ubuntu… An authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world.[336]

This view of personhood as rooted in community is further emphasized by Bujo, who argues that "An African person, whose acting and thinking is always in solidarity and almost identical with his or her tribal community, is nonetheless able to make an ethical, responsible decision, as an individual. Personhood is defined by one's relationships and responsibilities within the community…"[337] Wilson Maina supports this, noting that "The decisive issue determining the concept of personhood in African philosophical anthropology is 'relatedness' and 'fellowship vis-à-vis contextual, specific, communally desirable and acceptable manner of living,"[338] affirming the idea that individual identity and moral agency are shaped within the communal framework. John Mbiti's well-known maxim "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am"[339] encapsulates the essence of Ubuntu and reflects the deeply held belief that individual existence is affirmed through communal belonging.

Michael Onyebuchi Eze further explains: "To deny another's humanity is to depreciate my own humanity. To be a person is to recognize, therefore, that my subjectivity is in part constituted by other persons with whom I share the social world."[340] Both thinkers highlight the reciprocal nature of human dignity and the shared responsibility embedded within African moral philosophy. However, communitarianism is not without critique. Philosophers such as Robert Nozick, John Rawls, and Ronald Dworkin emphasize the importance of individual rights and warn against communal values suppressing personal freedoms. Rawls, in particular, advocates

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[335] Stanlake John Thompson Samkange & Tommie Marie Samkange, *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indigenous Political Philosophy* (Salisbury, Zimbabwe: Graham Publishing, 1980), 7.
[336]Lovemore Mbigi & Jenny Maree, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management* (South Africa: Knowres Pub., 1995), 75; Cf. Jacob Mugumbate & Admire Chereni, "Using African Ubuntu theory in social work with children in Zimbabwe," *African Journal of Social Work* 9, no. 1 (2019): 27–35.
[337] Bénézet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: St Paul Publications, 1990), 95.
[338] Wilson Maina, "African Communitarian Ethics in The Theological Work of Bénézet Bujo," retrieved from https://www.scribd.com/document/386911597/Maino-Wilson-Muoho-2008-African-Communitarian-Ethics-in-the-Theological-Work-of-Benezet-Bujo (accessed 28/10/2024).
[339] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 106.
[340] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, "What is African Communitarianism? Against Consensus as a Regulative Ideal," *South African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 27, 4 (2008): 386-399, 387.

for a model of justice where individuals can pursue their conception of the good, grounded in "justice as fairness."[341] David Lewis Schaefer notes that such critiques caution against the risk that communitarian ethics may justify oppressive norms or marginalize dissenting voices under the guise of preserving community values[342] particularly against minority groups or dissenting individuals.

These tensions are evident in contemporary Kilifi County, where the erosion of traditional communal values among youth has contributed to rising crime, insecurity, and moral confusion. As personal preferences begin to override communal norms, ethical inconsistencies emerge, clashing with the long-standing communitarian ethos of the Midzi-Chenda people. Their cultural principles emphasize solidarity, mutual support, and placing the community's welfare above individual gain. Acts of crime and unrest fracture this moral foundation, creating fear and division. Reintroducing Midzi-Chenda moral teachings to the youth can help restore ethical discipline. It can also strengthen social bonds and shape individuals of character, rooted in the values of African communitarianism.

3.8.4 Virtue Ethics (Character-Based Ethics)

Virtue ethics, closely linked with communitarian ethics, emphasizes the formation of moral character over strict adherence to rules (deontology) or consequences (consequentialism). It stresses that moral behavior flows from a well-developed character. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a virtue is "a habitual and firm disposition to do the good."[343] This disposition not only enables individuals to perform good acts but empowers them to give the best of themselves. A virtuous person tends toward the good with all their sensory and spiritual powers, choosing it in concrete actions. The ultimate goal of a virtuous life, as the Catechism beautifully puts it, is "to become like God"[344] The focus is more on the development of good character. One of the three major approaches in normative ethics emphasizes virtues or moral characters rather than the duties of deontologists or the consequences of actions, as suggested by consequentialists.

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[341] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (ed.), Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 19.
[342] David Lewis Schaefer, "contemporary thinkers, Nozick and Rawls–John Rawls's," retrieved from https://contemporarythinkers.org/john-rawls/commentary/nozick-rawls-david-lewis-schaefer/ (accessed 03/11/2024).
[343] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1803.
[344] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1803.

Unlike rule-based approaches, virtue ethics is person-oriented. It focuses on who we are, not just what we do. As Sondra Rueter notes, "We should take responsibility for our actions, show respect for others, and strive to promote justice and equality in our society. By acting with integrity and behaving virtuously, youth can create a better world for everyone."[345] Virtue ethics invites us to look at the moral character of the person acting. Prince Kumar adds, "The essence of virtue ethics lies in the belief that actions reflect character. It is not just about what you do, but who you are."[346] Such insights affirm that virtuous persons naturally align their behavior with the good of the community, guided by genuine moral intention rather than external incentives. Ivan Panin captures this intrinsic worth by stating, "To seek virtue for the sake of reward is to dig for iron with a spade of gold"[347] This means that true virtue must be pursued out of love for the good and for God, not for selfish reward.

Similarly, Brian Boone defines virtue ethics as "the idea that ethics is about the agents, not their actions or consequences. Those agents must own positive character traits called virtues to act morally and have a good character. "[348] Boone's perspective flows seamlessly into Aristotle's classical formulation of virtue ethics, examining how individuals can develop good character and virtue. For Aristotle:

> The ultimate goal of human life is happiness, which is achieved not through pleasure or wealth but by cultivating moral virtues like courage, temperance, generosity and friendliness. Virtues involve moderation between extremes. For example, courage lies between rashness and cowardice. Virtues are developed through habit, requiring repeated voluntary actions. Right actions involve practical reasoning to deliberate about goals and choose actions accordingly. While knowledge does not always lead to right conduct, virtues can still be achieved through addressing weaknesses of will.[349]

As Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock summarize, "For Aristotle, morality has more to do with the question 'How should I be?' rather than 'What should I do?'"[350] Thomas Aquinas, building on Aristotle, infused virtue ethics with Christian theology. He argued that happiness is

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[345] Sondra Rueter, "Exploring Virtue Ethics: The Philosophical Theory," retrieved from https://www.philosophos.org/ethical-theories-virtue-ethics (accessed 13/10/2024).
[346] Prince Kumar, "Ethics, The Interconnection between Virtues and Actions in Ethical Living," retrieved from https://philosophy.institute/ethics/ethical-living-virtues-actions-interconnection/ (accessed 12/10/2024).
[347] Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock, *Ethics for A-Level* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), 296.
[348] Brian Boone, *Ethics 101- From Altruism and Utilitarianism to Bioethics and Political Ethics, An Exploration of the Concepts of Right and Wrong* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2017), 25.
[349] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1099a2–5.
[350] Andrew Fisher and Mark Dimmock, *Ethics for A-Level*, 303.

not found in material wealth or pleasure, but in living virtuously according to both natural and divine law. In Aquinas' words

> True happiness is achieved not through material goods or pleasure, but by living a virtuous life in accordance with the natural law and divine law. He believed virtues and principles for right action should guide people to live fulfilling lives and attain beatitude or perfect happiness with God, in the afterlife.[351]

His synthesis of reason and faith elevated virtue to a theological and eternal dimension. In his *Prima Secundae of the Summa theologiae*, Aquinas, drawing on thinkers like Ambrose, Gregory, Cicero, and Augustine, elaborated the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These are called "principal" that is they are fundamental to attaining the "rectitude of appetite" of virtuous living. That rectitude is central because "virtue not only confers the faculty of doing well, but also causes the good deed done."[352] The four virtues are cardinal because they sufficiently order all those areas of our lives that are engaged in moral acting. However, James Keenan critiques this classical model for being overly simplistic and detached from contemporary anthropological insights. He argues that "the classical list of the cardinal virtues fails to serve contemporary needs for three reasons. First, it is deceptively simple and inadequate. Second, a different anthropology has more recently emerged that insists on the relationality of the human. Finally, as if to prove this anthropological claim, philosophers and theologians have proposed virtues that are premised on our relationality."[353] This means modern ethics must recognize that human beings are intrinsically shaped by relationships, and therefore, virtues must also reflect our relational existence.

Keenan observes that "Aquinas' structure insists on a hierarchal uniformity that does not anticipate or admit conflict."[354] As he notes, "according to Aquinas the whole matter of moral virtues falls under the one rule of prudence. With Aristotle, Thomas upholds the absolute priority of prudence; no acquired virtue is more important."[355] Prudence, then, serves as the meta-virtue that ensures the proper application of all others, aligning right means with right ends. Yet, Keenan acknowledges that virtues can conflict. In his view:

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[351] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 55, a. 1,
[352] Thomas Aquinas, *Smma Theologicae*, 5 ST 1-2, q. 61, a. 1.
[353] James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 709–729, 718.
[354] James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 709–729, 718.
[355] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, 1-2.65.1 ad 3; ST 1.79.12 corp; 2-2.47.6 & 7.

> Cardinal virtues conflict with one another, then the function of the virtue of prudence greatly expands. In the more harmonious classical list of cardinal virtues, prudence's primary task was to determine justice when dealing with our actions, temperance when dealing with our desires, and fortitude when dealing with our struggles. But in this new proposal, prudence would have to name not only what the claim of each particular virtue is, but also what priority that claim enjoys.[356]

Stanley Hauerwas echoes this in asserting that moral agents must navigate "conflicting loyalties" throughout our lives. That sorting out means that in the long run we are to live a life that ethically incorporates the variety of relational claims which are made on us. This we do through the narrative of the lives we live."[357] As Keenan puts it "… the insufficiency of the classical list of cardinal virtues prompts us to find virtues that satisfactorily encompass the basic and at times competitive claims to which a virtuous person must respond."[358] This leads to a broader anthropological turn, where ethical reflection no longer asks "What is it?" but rather "Who are we?" Keenan argues "The turn to the subject has prompted many to abandon a classicist anthropology that examined humanity by asking "what is it?" The contemporary ethicist does not examine humanity as something to be known, but reflects on humanity as knowing and asks "who are we?"[359] Keenan argues:

> To have a viable anthropology is to understand ourselves as agents and not as objects; moreover, as agents we are always relational. Thus virtues do not perfect what we have or what we do; rather they perfect who we are in the mode of our being, which is as being in relationships. Virtues do not perfect powers or "things" inside of us, but rather ways that we are.[360]

Accordingly, Keenan proposes a revised list of cardinal virtues: justice, fidelity, self-care, and prudence. He writes: "As persons, we are relational in three ways: generally, specifically, and uniquely… As a relational beings, we are called to justice. As a relational being specifically, we are called to fidelity. As a relational being uniquely, we are called to self-care. These three virtues are cardinal."[361] These, for Keenan, are not simply "add-ons," but essential expressions of prudence in a morally complex, relational world. While Aquinas assigns prudence top priority as the guiding force of virtue, Keenan broadens its scope to address the ethical intricacies of contemporary life, where virtues must be discerned and balanced amid relational demands and

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[356] James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 709–729, 722.
[357] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) 144.
[358] James F. Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 709–729, 722.
[359] James F. Keenan, 709–729, 722
[360] James F. Keenan, 709–729, 723.
[361] James F. Keenan, 709–729, 723.

competing values. Building on this re-centering of the moral agent, Joan Tronto offers a parallel expansion from a feminist perspective. Like Keenan, she moves beyond abstract, action-based ethics, reframing virtue through the lens of care and social responsibility. Tronto defines the ethic of care as "a moral and political approach grounded in the reality that all human beings are interdependent, we both give and receive care throughout our lives."[362]

For her, morality is inseparable from relational life. Ethics is not just as individual choices but as part of how we live together in community because people depend on one another. Being moral involves caring for others and recognizing shared responsibility. Ethics, in her view, must address real human needs and relationships, not just abstract rules. According to Tronto, ethics of care involves five key elements:

> … Attentiveness (noticing others' needs), responsibility (taking it upon oneself to respond), competence (delivering care effectively), responsiveness (considering how the care is received), and later, solidarity (recognizing shared vulnerability and collective responsibility). These phases are not just personal virtues but political practices that reveal power dynamics and social inequalities in how care is distributed and valued.[363]

This care framework challenges traditional moral theories for neglecting the labor of care, especially that undertaken by women and marginalized groups. She repositions care as integral to justice and democratic life. For Tronto, moral excellence requires responsiveness to real needs in real contexts, emphasizing that ethics must be lived relationally, not abstractly. In doing so, Tronto deepens and diversifies virtue ethics, aligning it with the demands of a more inclusive, care-centered moral vision; one that speaks directly to human vulnerability, interdependence, and the ongoing task of sustaining just relationships.

A general assessment of the ethical theories: deontology, consequentialism, communitarianism, and virtue ethics, shows that each offers a unique lens for guiding human behaviour. Deontology stresses duty and moral rules, consequentialism highlights outcomes and the common good, communitarianism emphasizes shared values and social belonging, while virtue ethics focuses on personal character and moral growth. Taken together, they provide a comprehensive understanding of ethics: one that balances principles, impact, community, and inner character in shaping responsible and meaningful lives.

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[362] Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 103.
[363] Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 126–137.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a critical ethical analysis of moral relativism by first tracing its historical development. The analysis revealed how shifting philosophical paradigms, from classical objectivism to postmodern thought, contributed to the decline of absolute moral standards. It then examined how this shift has historically led to doctrinal distortions, as seen in the rise of heresies like Arianism, Gnosticism, Pelagianism, and Modernism. These heresies emerged when individuals or cultures replaced divinely revealed truths with subjective interpretations, undermining the authority of the Church's teaching. This background established the need to understand the theoretical foundations of relativism.

The discussion further examined the principal types of moral relativism: normative, descriptive, cultural, and meta-ethical. Each form demonstrates how moral judgments are shaped by personal convictions, communal customs, or overarching philosophical claims that reject the existence of objective moral truth. This theoretical framework was then applied to the lived experiences of youth in Kilifi County, where socio-cultural pressures, inadequate catechetical formation, and economic hardships contribute to ethical uncertainty and doctrinal confusion. In response to these challenges, the chapter introduced four major ethical theories: deontology, consequentialism, communitarianism, and virtue ethics as constructive tools for cultivating sound moral reasoning grounded in truth and human dignity. While moral understanding must be sensitive to cultural context, it is essential that it remains anchored in shared values that uphold justice, integrity, and the common good. The subsequent chapter will build upon this foundation by examining the theological dimensions of moral relativism, further deepening the ethical reflection.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MORAL THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON MORAL RELATIVISM

Introduction

This chapter addresses moral relativism from theological and philosophical angles. It asserts that ethical reasoning requires objective and universal moral norms. Relativism erodes truth and accountability. Building on Chapter Three, the discussion engages six key dimensions. First, the chapter presents classical philosophical critiques that expose logical contradictions in relativist thought. Second, the analysis draws from Sacred Scripture to affirm a divinely revealed moral order. Third, it considers the Church Fathers' foundational contributions to Christian moral theology. Fourth, the work of medieval theologians is examined, showing their systematic grounding of ethics in natural and divine law. Fifth, the chapter explores magisterial teachings as a firm doctrinal stance against relativism. Sixth, African moral theologians provide contextual depth through communal and culturally grounded ethical perspectives.

4.1 Classical Philosophical Foundations Against Moral Relativism

The challenge of moral relativism first emerged in ancient Greek thought, long before Christian theology addressed it. The Sophists shifted the philosophical focus to subjective ethics, arguing, as the Philosophy Institute notes, that "truth is not absolute but relative to individual perception and social context. Protagoras' maxim "Man is the measure of all things,"[364] captures the heart of this relativist view, which denies objective moral standards. In contrast, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle defended universal moral truths through reason, dialectic, and virtue ethics. Their work laid the philosophical groundwork for later theological critiques of relativism.

4.1.1 Socrates: Moral Inquiry as a Path to Objective Truth

Socrates laid the foundation for objective moral reasoning by challenging the relativism of the Sophists through critical questioning and rational dialogue. He maintained that "virtue and

[364] Philosophy Institute, "The Sophists: The Art of Rhetoric and Relativism in Pre-Socratic Philosophy," retrieved from https://philosophy.institute/western-philosophy/sophists-art-rhetoric-relativism-pre-socratic/ (accessed 29/06/2025).

justice are not subject to individual opinion but can be discovered through rational inquiry and dialogue."[365] Central to his philosophy was the conviction that ethical truth requires constant self-examination and intellectual honesty. As Plato records in the Apology, Socrates famously declared, "The unexamined life is not worth living,"[366] underscoring his belief that moral truths are universal and not constructed by social convention. For him, a life devoid of reflection fails to engage the uniquely human capacity for reason, resulting in a passive existence without understanding of what is truly good or just. Living without reflection is worse than not living at all. Socrates' unwavering commitment to this philosophical mission led him to accept death rather than abandon the pursuit of truth.

4.1.2 Plato: The Incoherence of Relativism and the Reality of Moral Forms

Plato's critique of relativism from his dialogue *Theaetetus,* particularly sections 170a–171c. In this passage, Plato through Socrates challenges Protagoras' claim that "man is the measure of all things" by showing that if all beliefs are equally true, then the belief that relativism is false must also be true, which renders the theory self-refuting. Plato claims that "moral relativism has no ethical or logical ground to stand on, since it is "logically self-defeating."[367] In contrast, Plato affirms the existence of absolute moral values, such as justice and right conduct, which are not subject to personal or cultural variation. Linda Ray explains that Plato's conviction rests on his Theory of Forms, which posits a realm of "eternal, perfect realities beyond the changing physical world"[368] that serve as stable standards for moral judgment. These Forms: Justice, Beauty, Equality, and the Good, embody the perfect essence of all things. Andreas Matthias supports this view, noting that "Physical objects are considered flawed reflections of perfect Forms, emphasizing their impermanence and constant change."[369] Plato

[365] Russ Payne, "An Introduction to Philosophy, Humanities," retrieved from https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/An_Introduction_to_Philosophy_(Payne)/03%3A_Ancient_Philosophy/3.02%3A_Socrates (accessed 29/06/2025).
[366] Plato, "Apology," in *Plato: Complete Works* (ed.) John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 38a. "Socrates made this statement during his trial, defending his lifelong commitment to philosophy."
[367] Plato, *Theaetetus in Platonis Opera*, edited by John Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900); Cf. David Barber, "Plato's Arguments on the Inconsistency of Relativism," retrieved from https://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/barber-the_inconsistency_of_relativism.pdf (accessed 16/07/2025).
[368] Linda Ray, "Plato's Critique of Cultural Moral Relativism," retrieved from https://www.theclassroom.com/platos-critique-of-cultural-moral-relativism-12085989.html (accessed 29/06/2025).
[369] Andreas Matthias, "Plato's Theory of Forms: Stepping out of the shadows and into the light," retrieved from https://daily-philosophy.com/platos-theory-of-forms/ (accessed 06/29/2025).

held that true moral knowledge arises from reason, not sensory experience. His Theory of Forms provided a lasting foundation for objective ethics in both philosophy and theology.

4.1.3 Aristotle: Virtue Ethics and the Teleological Basis of Morality

Aristotle (384–322 BC) rejected moral relativism by grounding ethics in a teleological framework, where every being has a natural purpose (telos). As Fisher and Dimmock explain, "Aristotle was a *teleologist*, a Greek term *telos* referring to what we might call a purpose, goal, end or true final function of an object," *teleologist* because he believed that every object has what he referred to as a final cause."[370] He claimed that "…for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function."[371] For humans, this function is reason. Acting in accordance with reason fulfills our nature and leads to moral excellence. Aristotle argued:

> All objects have a telos. An object is good when it properly secures its telos. Aristotle directs his thinking towards human beings specifically. The telos of a human being is to reason. The good for a human being is, therefore, acting in accordance with reason. In working out our true function, Aristotle looks to that feature that separates humanity from other living animals. According to Aristotle, what separates humankind from the rest of the world is our ability not only to reason but to act on reasons.[372]

Thus, the good life consists in living rationally, which fulfills our essential nature and final cause. Fisher and Dimmock affirm that "The good life for a human being is achieved when we act in accordance with our telos."[373] In Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle writes that "moral virtue arises from cultivating habits that align with reason, which is the distinctive function of human beings."[374] While he acknowledged that the expression of virtue may vary with context, Aristotle maintained that the principles of virtuous living are universal, rooted in human nature and aimed at the common good. His ethics maintain moral objectivity through the "golden mean," a balanced state between extremes, cultivated by habituation and guided by phronēsis

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[370] Andrew Fisher & Mark Dimmock, "Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Introduction," retrieved from https://pressbooks.pub/phronesis/chapter/virtue-ethics/ (accessed 30/06/2025).
[371] Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics, Book 2," in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, retrieved from http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg010.perseus-eng1:2 (accessed 30/06/2025).
[372] Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics, Book 2," in Aristotle in 23 Volumes, retrieved from http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg010.perseus-eng1:2 (accessed 30/06/2025).
[373] Andrew Fisher & Mark Dimmock, "Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Introduction," retrieved from https://pressbooks.pub/phronesis/chapter/virtue-ethics/ (accessed 30/06/2025).
[374] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Book II, 1103a15–1103b25.

(practical wisdom).[375] For example, courage is the mean between recklessness and cowardice. Aristotle summarizes:

> All humans share a purpose (telos), and living virtuously fulfills this function. Virtues like courage and justice are objectively good because they align with reason, which is the defining feature of human beings. Moral excellence involves acting in accordance with the "golden mean." Moral truth is not relative but rooted in our shared human nature and rationality.[376]

The classical philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle establish a coherent intellectual foundation against moral relativism by affirming that moral truth is objective, discoverable through reason, and grounded in human nature. Socrates underscored the importance of rational inquiry and the know-ability of virtue through disciplined reflection. Plato introduced the Theory of Forms, positing that moral standards such as Justice and the Good are absolute and transcendent. Aristotle advanced this legacy by rooting morality in the teleological function of human reason arguing that virtues like courage and justice are objectively good because they align with reason. Collectively, their thought rejects relativism and prepares the way for Christian moral theology, which locates the source of moral order not in human perception but in divine revelation. Scripture and the person of Christ serve as the ultimate expressions of this moral truth. This theological tradition is expanded through the writings of the Church Fathers, the scholastic rigor of medieval moral theologians, authoritative teachings of the Magisterium, and contemporary scholarship. African theological perspectives further enrich the discourse, grounding moral reasoning in communal responsibility and cultural wisdom. Together, these sources affirm that moral objectivity is both rationally defensible and theologically indispensable.

4.2 Biblical Foundations for Objective Morality

The Scripture firmly rejects moral relativism by affirming absolute moral truths established by God, which transcend cultural and personal preferences. From the fall in Genesis to the teachings of Jesus, the Bible consistently portrays deviation from God's standards as a rejection of divine truth. As Mary Oelerich-Meyer observes: Moral relativism is a rejection of God

[375] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Book II, 1107a1–1107a8.

[376] Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book 2," in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, retrieved from http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg010.perseus-eng1:2 (accessed 30/06/2025).

entirely. It started at the beginning of time when God told Adam and Eve the standard of behaviour that He expected from them. They chose their own truth. In the next generation, Cain knew what God expected, and he took the power of life from his brother Abel. Cain created his own standard of behaviour and what he thought was right."[377] The Bible is a history of God and His chosen people who did not always follow His standards, as laid out in the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament and the words of Jesus in the New Testament.

4.2.1 The Old Testament: Absolute Covenantal Moral Norms

The Old Testament establishes morality through divine covenants, presenting God as the supreme and unchanging moral authority. As stated in Exodus 3:14, "I AM WHO I AM," God reveals His eternal nature as the foundation of ethical order. Biblical morality is rooted in obedience to God's will, transcending cultural norms and personal opinions. True righteousness, therefore, is found in knowing, loving, and faithfully following God.

4.2.2.1 The Pentateuch and Covenantal Morality

The Old Testament upholds morality as an absolute standard rooted in the nature and will of God. The Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy presents divine laws as immutable, demanding obedience to ensure holiness, justice, and covenantal fidelity. In Genesis 2:16–17, God establishes a moral boundary for Adam and Eve. Eugene H. Maly explains, "This directive establishes an absolute moral boundary, with clear consequences for disobedience. People's happiness is consequent upon remaining subject to God. The narrative reinforces the idea that divine commands are fixed and must be followed, regardless of human reasoning or circumstances."[378] This moral order is reinforced in Exodus 20:1–17 through the Ten Commandments, apodictic laws prohibiting idolatry, murder, theft, and false testimony. William Farmer describes these as "Laws that impose a command directly on a person obliging that person to perform or refrain from performing some actions that the legislator judges to be

[377] Mary Oelerich-Meyer, "Why Should Christians Be Concerned about Moral Relativism?" retrieved from https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/why-should-christians-be-concerned-about-moral-relativism.html (accessed 25/01/2025).
[378] Eugene H. Maly, "Genesis 2:15-17," in *The Old Testament, The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 7- 46, 12.

desirable or harmful… They are grounded in a person and God communicates them"[379] directly to the people.

These commandments serve as enduring ethical foundations shaping both personal behavior and communal justice. As the Catholic Encyclopedia teaches, "These precepts bear the fundamental obligations of religion and morality, embodying the revealed expression of the Creator's Will regarding man's duty to God and fellow humans… They guide moral conduct, foster a relationship with God, and promote social justice by advocating respect, honesty, and integrity, ultimately leading to eternal life."[380] Given to shape a sacred and just Israelite society, these laws reflect divine intent. Yet, as Dominik Mark and Dominic Irudayaraj observe, during the pre-monarchical era, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."[381] This reflects moral and social disintegration. The absence of centralized leadership and external cultural influences contributed to subjective moral judgments and deviation from covenantal ethics.

This theme of moral absolutism continues throughout Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Roland J. Faley, Fredrick L. Moriarty, and Joseph Blenkinsopp affirm that these books "continue the theme of moral absolutism established in Genesis and Exodus, reinforcing divine law as immutable and binding."[382] Leviticus intensifies this through the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26), prescribing strict ethical mandates. Numbers illustrates the consequences of obedience and rebellion, while Deuteronomy reaffirms moral law through covenantal renewal. The blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 highlight the enduring link between righteousness and divine favor. Collectively, these texts present a unified moral vision in which obedience to divine law is both a religious and ethical imperative.

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[379] William R. Farmer, (eds.), *The International Bible Commentary, A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, Minnesota: A Liturgical Press, 1998), 430.

[380] The Catholic Encyclopedia, "The Ten Commandments," retrieved from https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=11363 (accessed 09/01/2025).

[381] Dominik Mark & Dominic Irudayaraj, (eds.), "The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century", retrieved from https://www.academia73106386/The_Jerome_Biblical_Commentary_for_the_Twenty_First_Century (accessed 15/01/2025).

[382] Roland J. Faley, Fredrick L. Moriarty & Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy," *The Old Testament The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary,* (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986).

David Cruz Martinez notes "Israel's immorality stemmed from abandoning God's law for pagan practices."[383] Contemporary moral dilemmas among the youth in Kilifi County mirror Israel's departure from divine commands. The rising cases of early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and moral disengagement reflect a drift from traditional values under secular influence. John Karisa observes, "The absence of communal accountability deprives young people of a stable moral compass."[384] Similarly, external cultural forces and digital globalization in Kilifi County foster a relativistic moral outlook. The shift marked by substance abuse, gang violence, and disregard for elders underscores the urgency of reinforcing ethical structures rooted in divine moral absolutes through family, faith, and community leadership.

4.2.2.2 Moral Absolutism in the Historical Books

The historical books of Joshua and Judges illustrate the consequences of moral fidelity versus relativism within Israel's covenantal framework. In Joshua, Israel's conquest of Canaan is portrayed as a direct result of obedience to divine law. The fall of Jericho (Joshua 6) and the judgment of Achan (Joshua 7–8) demonstrate that blessings follow obedience, while disobedience incurs divine judgment. Joshua's farewell declaration: "Choose this day whom you will serve… But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15), embodies moral commitment. As Peter J. Kearney observes, "this is a profound declaration of moral and spiritual commitment... emphasizing that faithfulness to God's law is not merely an inherited tradition but an intentional and unwavering personal choice."[385] This underscores the biblical principle that moral truth is fixed and demands active personal and communal adherence. In contrast, Judges depicts moral decline in the absence of centralized authority and consistent ethical standards. The refrain "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25) signals the rise of ethical relativism.

Though figures like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson offer intermittent deliverance, their flawed leadership reflects deeper spiritual disorder. The recurring cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and restoration underscores the instability of a society detached from divine moral

[383] David Cruz Martinez, *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Liberty University Press, 2021), 39.
[384] Karisa observes, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikmbala, 25/02/20224.
[385] Peter J. Kearney, "Joshua", in *The Old Testament, The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 123-148, 147.

absolutes. The juxtaposition of Joshua's covenantal fidelity and Judges' moral chaos affirms that enduring justice and order depend on unwavering adherence to God's revealed law.

4.2.2.3 Moral Absolutism in Israel's Wisdom Tradition

Israel's Wisdom Literature affirms moral absolutism by grounding ethical discernment in reverence for God and fidelity to His divine order. Jerome writes, "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, flee from evil and to do good anchoring justice and integrity in God's unchanging nature."[386] Jerome is painting a picture of wisdom that is not just intellectual, but deeply spiritual and ethical, rooted in reverence for God, expressed through righteous living, and anchored in divine constancy. He notes that "Job did not serve God for reward, but because it was right to do so."[387] Righteousness is rooted in divine fidelity, not personal gain. In Commentary on Ecclesiastes, Jerome interprets "Fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccl 12:13), as a universal moral imperative, writing that "this is the sum of all wisdom: to obey God's law, which does not change with time or circumstance."[388] These insights reflect a consistent moral vision—one that resists relativism and calls humanity to live by eternal divine truth.

4.2.2.4 The Prophets as Heralds of Moral Absolutism

The Old Testament prophets functioned as divine emissaries, proclaiming the unchanging demands of God's justice amid moral and societal decline. Their denunciations of idolatry, corruption, and injustice affirmed that righteousness is not relative but anchored in God's revealed will. In Commentary on Isaiah, Jerome interprets Isaiah 5:20 "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" as "a warning against the inversion of moral categories,"[389] emphasizing that "divine justice is not subject to human reinterpretation. Jerome's insistence on the literal sense of Scripture reinforces his belief in the objectivity of moral law. As Thomas P. Scheck notes, Jerome "saw Isaiah's ethical vision as inseparable from the holiness of God, who

[386] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Proverbia Salomonis, in Patrologia Latina* 26, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1845), 15.
[387] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Iob Libri Quattuor, in Patrologia Latina* 28, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1845), 989 & 990.
[388] Jerome, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, trans. and ed. Richard J. Goodrich and David J. D. Miller (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 1129.
[389] Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015), 112–115.

is the fixed standard of righteousness."[390] It means that changing the meaning of right and wrong is not just a social issue but a rejection of God's authority. For Jerome, real justice comes from God's unchanging holiness, not from shifting human opinions.

In Commentary on Jeremiah, Jerome reflects on Jeremiah 2:13, where Judah abandons "the fountain of living waters" for broken cisterns. He interprets this as "the substitution of divine truth with transient human ideologies,"[391] framing Jeremiah's critique as a defense of immutable divine law. Michael Graves affirms that Jerome's reading is "rooted in the literal and moral dimensions of Scripture."[392] This mirrors his commitment to the permanence of God's standards. Jerome's interpretation of Amos 5:24, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" presents justice not as an ideal but as a divine imperative. He condemns ritualism divorced from ethical integrity, asserting that Amos's prophetic voice represents a timeless challenge to moral complacency, calling every generation to uphold covenantal justice. Taken together, the prophetic literature, alongside the Pentateuch, Historical Books, and Wisdom Writings, offers a unified theological vision of moral absolutism. Ethical norms are not culturally constructed or situational but divinely revealed, immutable, and binding. The Old Testament affirms that righteousness, justice, and obedience are sacred obligations flowing from the character and will of God, transcending human opinion and societal trends.

4.2.3 Christ-Centered Ethics in the New Testament

The New Testament grounds moral truth in the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, presenting Him as the definitive source of ethical authority. In contrast to moral relativism, it affirms absolute principles rooted in divine revelation. This section examines Christ's ethical vision as portrayed particularly in Matthew as a representative of the Synoptic tradition, alongside John,[393] which, although not synoptic, offers a distinct theological perspective on moral absolutes as evident in the Seven "I AM" statements. The Acts of the Apostles, and three

[390] Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 112–115.
[391] Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, trans. Michael Graves (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 87–90.
[392] Jerome, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 87–90.
[393] The Gospel of John is not considered a Synoptic Gospel because it differs significantly in structure, content, and theological emphasis from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Synoptic Gospels share a similar narrative framework, recounting many of the same events in Jesus' life with overlapping details. John, however, presents a unique perspective, focusing more on Jesus' divinity and deep theological themes.

Pauline Letter: Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians will be discussed as unified witnesses to a moral framework grounded in moral absolutism.

4.2.3.1 Moral Absolutism in the Gospel of Mathew

The Gospel of Matthew affirms moral absolutism through Jesus' unwavering commitment to the enduring authority of divine law. This is exemplified in His declaration: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets… not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Mt 5:17–18). Zinkuratire and Colacrai affirm, "Jesus came to fulfill the law as its final interpreter,"[394] while William Farmer emphasizes that "Jesus did not oppose the law and the prophets but sought to bring out their true meaning and purpose, completing and perfecting the teachings rather than discarding them."[395] This can be interpreted to mean that Jesus did not simply obey the law, He revealed its deepest intent. He clarified and embodied what the law was always pointing toward: love, justice, mercy, and holiness. As the final interpreter, Jesus had the authority to explain the law's true meaning, stripping away distortions and legalistic misapplications that had accumulated over time. He did not reject the Old Testament moral and prophetic teachings; instead, He completed and perfected them.

Both scholars affirm that Jesus fulfilled the law not by abolishing it, but by living it out perfectly and revealing its divine purpose. His teachings reoriented the law from mere external compliance to internal transformation rooted in love and truth. The practical dimension of Matthew's ethic is captured in the Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12). Francis Gumerlock interprets this as a command "to do for others the good that we wish for ourselves, regardless of the behaviour we experience or expect from them."[396] Early Church Fathers upheld this precept as central to Christian living, marking it as especially relevant for guiding youth through ethical uncertainty.

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[394] Victor Zinkuratire &Angelo Colacrai (eds.), *The African Bible, Biblical Text of the New American Bible* (Nairobi: St. Paul Communications/Daughters of St. Paul, 1999), 1642.
[395] William R. Farmer, (eds.), *The International Bible Commentary, A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, Minnesota: A Liturgical Press, 1998), 1273.
[396] Francis Gumerlock, "St. Jerome's Commentary on Matthew", retrieved from https://francisgumerlock.com/st-jerome-commentary-on-matthew/ (accessed 26/01/2025).

4.2.3.2 Moral Norms in John: The Seven "I AM" Statements

The Gospel of John presents a distinctive moral theology grounded in the self-revelation of Jesus through the seven "I AM" statements: 1) I am the bread of life, 2) I am the light of the world, 3) I am the door of the sheep, 4) I am the good shepherd, 5) I am the resurrection and life, 6) I am the way, the truth and the life and 7) I am the true vine. These declarations are Christological in essence and ethical in implication. They offer an absolute standard for truth, life, and conduct. Rooted in covenantal continuity and divine self-disclosure, they form a coherent moral vision that challenges relativism and calls believers into transformative relationship with Christ. Statements such as "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35) and "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12) affirm Jesus' divine identity while rooting moral truth in His person. These declarations are not mere symbols but theological assertions that Jesus is the source of life, truth, and guidance. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission states, "In these sayings Jesus discloses what God the Father has given to humanity in the person of the Son… the gifts of the new covenant: knowledge of God, the law, and life."[397] Thus, morality in John is not abstract law-keeping but relational obedience to the incarnate Logos.

Bruce Vawter writes that "Jesus is the spiritual nourishment that sustains eternal life, contrasting temporary satisfaction with divine provision. Jesus brings truth and guidance, dispelling darkness as He says "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Jesus is the light that that both gives life and is life, the life of those of those who cannot walk in darkness."[398] Jesus transitions from the imagery of light and darkness to that of the sheepgate, reinforcing the moral imperative of entering into a life-giving relationship with Him. Statements such as "I am the gate" (John 10:9), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11), and "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25) emphasize that He alone is the means of access to God and the fullness of life. As "the door," Jesus makes it explicitly clear that He is the only way to become part of the people of God. Those who enter through Him "go in and out," finding abundant life and the fullness of true freedom. These images convey ethical boundaries, fidelity, and sacrificial care, highlighting obedience, truthfulness, and accountability.

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[397] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §49.

[398] Bruce Vawtwer, "The Gospel According to John," in *The Old Testament, The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 404-466, 441.

As the Pontifical Biblical Commission affirms, "Jesus shows what people should do to draw benefit from the gifts his presence brings: come to him, believe in him, follow him and remain in him"[399] The early Christian call was to imitate Christ's self-giving love, modeled in His role as the shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Bruce Vawter writes:

> Jesus explicitly call Himself the "good" *kalos* or the model shepherd. He has not lost sight of the fact that the true shepherd must be distinguished from the robbers and bandits. Jesus associates with Himself as legitimate shepherd of the people, those who have come to the fold through Him, which is the apostles and their successors. He is the perfect shepherd, the true shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He knows and is known by the sheep of God. Jesus' concern as the shepherd of the people of God goes far beyond the Old Testament type of shepherds.[400]

In John 14:6, Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," uniting epistemological, ethical, and existential dimensions in His person. Jesus explicitly affirms Martha's belief in a resurrection to come when He declares, "I am the resurrection and the life…" (John 11:25–26). This statement emphasizes that resurrection is not merely an event but is found in Jesus personally, holding the power over life and death. John L. McKenzie interprets "The Way" as a way of life and conduct, reinforcing that Christianity is not merely a belief system but a transformative journey centered on Christ."[401] Victor Zinkuratire and Angelo Colacrai further illustrate this by comparing Jesus to a guide rather than a mere signpost, stating, "Many great teachers and preachers can show us the way, however, they are like traffic signs. Just like signs, they cannot get to where they are pointing. Jesus is pointing the way, he has learnt the way to the Father and so, he is the way to the Father."[402] This underscores the belief in an absolute truth found in Jesus, who is both the guide and the destination. Jesus is not just the teacher of morality but the standard and path to moral life.

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[399] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §49.
[400] Bruce Vawtwer, "The Johannine Epistle," in *The Old Testament, The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 404-466, 444 & 445.
[401] John L. Mckenzie, *The Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 924.
[402] Victor Zinkuratire & Angelo Colacrai (eds.), *The African Bible, Biblical Text of the New American Bible* (Nairobi: St. Paul Communications/Daughters of St. Paul, 1999), 1811.

Likewise, the statement "I am the true vine" (John 15:5) expresses the necessity of abiding in Christ to bear spiritual and ethical fruit. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission notes, "He shows what people should do to draw benefit from the gifts his presence brings: come to him, believe in him, follow him and remain in him."[403] These imperatives illustrate that Christian ethics is inseparable from communion with Christ, emphasizing transformation, obedience, and fruitfulness within God's moral economy. This metaphor vividly illustrates the essential and life-sustaining relationship between Christ and His followers. Just as branches depend on the vine for nourishment and vitality, believers must remain intimately connected to Jesus to thrive spiritually. The imagery underscores the necessity of abiding in Christ, as separation from Him results in spiritual barrenness. As Bruce Vawter writes "this underscores the relation of the Christian to Christ, the community of life that they share, and Christ's life as the source of good works of Christians."[404] His statement highlights the believer's communal bond with Christ, emphasizing that His life serves as the source of all Christian good works.

The vine-and-branches metaphor in John 15 is not merely illustrative but theologically foundational, signifying the believer's total dependence on Christ for spiritual vitality and moral fruitfulness. According to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the seven "I AM" statements encapsulate the fullness of Christ's identity and mission: "Jesus is bread, light, gate, shepherd, resurrection and life, way, truth and life, and vine. These affirmations reveal both the divine gifts present in Christ and the moral response required of humanity, "come to him, believe in him, follow him and remain in him"[405] They express the core elements of the new covenant: knowledge of God, fidelity to divine law, and the life it produces, embodied integrally and organically in Christ, as symbolized most vividly by the relationship between the vine and its branches.

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[403] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §49.
[404] Bruce Vawtwer, "The Johannine Epistle", in *The Old Testament, The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 404-466, 454.
[405] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §49.

4.2.3.4 The Acts of the Apostles on Moral Absolutism

Moral absolutism in the Acts of the Apostles is reflected in the early Christian community's steadfast commitment to divine truth and ethical integrity. As Richard J. Dillon and Joseph A. Fitzmyer observe, "the first Christian community embraced communal living, where possessions were shared, and individuals voluntarily sold their belongings for distribution, embodying the ideals of fellowship (koinonia) and reinforcing the principle of moral integrity within a collective society."[406] This radical solidarity was not shaped by cultural norms but by divine command, expressing a covenantal ethic rooted in the teachings of Jesus. The Pontifical Biblical Commission affirms this continuity with Israel's moral tradition, stating: "The first Christian community that was gathered around the person of Jesus viewed itself in continuity with the people of Israel, bound by the same moral responsibilities inherent in belonging to that community."[407] This covenantal identity fostered a shared commitment to justice, compassion, and truth, reinforcing the community's ethical coherence and accountability.

Acts further emphasizes that Christian faith is a communal vocation grounded in obedience to God's authority. Peter's declaration, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), establishes divine command as the ultimate moral standard. The account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) illustrates the gravity of violating this standard. As Dillon and Fitzmyer explain, "The couple's sin was not merely withholding a portion of their goods, but the false pretense of complete generosity, which violated the communal trust and the absolute moral standard of honesty before God."[408] Their immediate judgment affirms the inviolability of divine law and the non-negotiable nature of righteousness. The Pontifical Biblical Commission further emphasizes, "Members of the community are bound to render true worship to God, to take care of others, to form a community of love and friendship, to share earthly goods so that no one is in need and to continue the mission of healing and reconciliation, following the example of Jesus

[406] Richard J. Dillon & Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Acts of the Apostles," in *The Old Testament, The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 165-214, 180.
[407] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §50.
[408] Richard J. Dillon & Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Acts of the Apostles," in T*he Old Testament, The New Testament and Topical Articles: The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (eds.), Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 165-214, 180.

himself in his proclamation of the kingdom."[409] Acts thus portrays moral absolutism not as rigid legalism, but as a dynamic expression of discipleship rooted in divine revelation and communal fidelity.

4.2.3.5 Moral Absolutism in Pauline Letters

Pauline ethics are grounded in the conviction that moral truth is absolute, revealed through the will of God and the redemptive work of Christ. In Romans, Paul affirms a universal moral order: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). This ethical vision transcends cultural relativism and calls for transformation through divine grace. The Pontifical Biblical Commission explains, "The gift of justification is not a mere declaration of innocence, but a transformation of the person, who is called to live according to the Spirit."[410] Paul urges believers, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2). Jerome, in his Commentary on Romans, writes, "Paul does not abolish the law but fulfills it through the law of faith, which leads to righteousness."[411] In Galatians, Paul warns against moral license: "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal 5:13). The Pontifical Biblical Commission notes "Paul's moral teaching is not a return to the law, but a call to live by the Spirit, whose fruit is love, joy, peace, and self-control."[412] Jerome affirms, "Paul does not reject the law's moral value, but he insists that righteousness comes from the Spirit, not from circumcision or ritual observance."[413] The contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:19–23) reflects a Spirit-empowered ethic rooted in divine authority.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses moral confusion by reaffirming the primacy of divine truth over cultural permissiveness. He writes, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19–20), grounding ethical conduct in the believer's redeemed identity. The Pontifical Biblical Commission underscores, "Paul's exhortations are

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[409] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §50.
[410] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §3.3.2.
[411] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Romanos*, in Patrologia Latina 30, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1845), 617.
[412] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §3.3.2
[413] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Galatas, in Patrologia Latina* 26, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1845), 307.

grounded in the believer's new identity in Christ, which entails a radical ethical transformation."[414] Jerome echoes this in his commentary, stating, "The body is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body; therefore, the Christian must live in holiness, not according to the passions of the world."[415] For Paul, moral absolutism is not rigid legalism but a dynamic conformity to God's holiness through the Spirit. This Christ-centered ethic, consistent across the Gospels, Acts, and Pauline letters, offers clarity and moral grounding in contexts such as Kilifi County, where youth face ethical uncertainty. It calls youth to truth, love, and holiness amid shifting cultural values.

4.3 The Fathers of the Church

The Church Fathers played a pivotal role in shaping early Christian doctrine and moral teaching, particularly in response to emerging moral relativism. As Philip Kosloski notes, "the Church Fathers are foundational members of the early Christian Church who nurtured the faith of the early Church and upheld the teachings of the Apostles. They were dedicated to upholding and promoting the teachings of the Apostles." [416] Their role extended beyond theological instruction to spiritual formation and pastoral guidance. Michael Glazier and Monica K. Hellwig explain, "Fathers of the Church" or "Church Fathers" is a term referring to teachers or authentic witnesses of Christian tradition from an early date. Both in scripture and in the early church, "father" was a term given to someone who provided spiritual formation through his teaching. In this sense, Elijah was a father to Elisha (2 Kgs 2:12)."[417] By the second century, the title encompassed bishops and ecclesiastical writers who, though not ordained, faithfully transmitted apostolic tradition. As Glazier and Hellwig further emphasize, "according to the traditionally accepted criteria, the fathers of the church were characterized by holiness of life, orthodoxy of doctrine, approval of the church and antiquity. The era of the Fathers is generally held to have been closed at the death of Gregory the Great (604) in the West and John of Damascus (749) in the East."[418]

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[414] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), §3.3.2.
[415] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Corinthios*, *in Patrologia Latina* 30, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1845), 775.
[416] Philip Kosloski, "Who are the "Fathers of the Church" and why do they matter?" retrieved from https://aleteia.org/2018/02/02/who-are-the-fathers-of-the-church-and-why-do-they-matter (accessed 27/01/2025).
[417] Michael Glazier & Monica K. Hellwig, *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* (Ireland: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1994), 314.
[418] Michael Glazier & Monica K. Hellwig, *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* (Ireland: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 1994), 314.

In their ethical reflections, the Church Fathers consistently upheld moral absolutes rooted in divine revelation, countering the relativistic tendencies of their time. James T. Bretzke observes, "Throughout history, at least from Jesus' time to the present, it seems that institutionally embedded religious authorities have fought hard against what is perceived as the increasing moral relativism of the age, and thus have tended to stress clear-cut Rules and principles. What I interpret Jesus as critiquing is excessive legalism and calling instead for a higher Gospel-inspired principle of mercy."[419] The Fathers balanced doctrinal clarity with pastoral sensitivity, addressing real social concerns within their communities. As Adalbert Hamman notes, "many Church Fathers were aware of their communities' social situations. They recognized social inequality as a significant issue affecting the spiritual and existential health of their congregations. They strongly urged the wealthy and well-to-do to share their resources with those in need."[420] This section highlights the theological and moral contributions of Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine of Hippo, whose writings continue to inform the Church's ethical response to relativism and its enduring call to justice and mercy.

4.3.1 Origen on Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Origen, one of the most influential theologians of the early Greek Church, developed a robust theological framework on free will and moral responsibility that directly counters moral relativism. He emphasized that rational beings possess moral agency and are accountable for their choices. As he asserted:

> Rational creatures possess the freedom to choose between good and evil, making them responsible for their actions. The proper use of free will, aided by divine grace, allow individuals to achieve moral and spiritual restoration. After the fall, humans cannot return to their original goodness by their own efforts alone. They require the grace of God and the redeeming work of Christ to achieve moral and spiritual restoration. This grace is realized through the free will of individuals, who must choose to accept and cooperate with divine assistance.[421]

Origen's theology affirms that human freedom is not autonomous but operates in cooperation with divine grace, making moral restoration both a gift and a responsibility. Origen's

[419] James T. Bretzke, *Moral Debates in Contemporary Catholic Thought: Paradigms, Principles, and Prudence* (London: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2025), 210.
[420] Adalbert Hamman, "The Social Morality of John Chrysostom: The Contribution of Adalbert Hamman (1910-2000)," *Journal Oriental Christian Periodicals* (1975): 649-660, 650.
[421] Origen, "The School of Alexandria, Origen – Ch - 12 – Free Will," retrieved from https://www.copticchurch.net/patrology/schoolofalex2/chapter12.html (accessed 27/01/2025)

writings consistently highlight the interplay between divine assistance and human choice. As Kevin Knight cites in *De Principiis*, (On First Principles), "Origen discusses the nature of free will and its implications for moral responsibility. He argues that rational creatures are endowed with the ability to choose between good and evil, making them accountable for their actions..."[422] In his Homilies on Genesis, Origen further affirms, "All rational creatures were created equal in goodness but can fall from grace through their choices..."[423] his rejection of determinism underscores his belief that moral failure stems from individual decisions, while restoration requires divine grace freely accepted. Origen's synthesis of moral autonomy and grace offers a compelling ethical vision that remains foundational for Christian moral theology.

4.3.1 John Chrysostom on Social Morality

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), born in Antioch, was a towering figure in early Christian theology, renowned for his eloquence and moral clarity. His writings—especially Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Wealth and Poverty, and the Divine Liturgy—reflect a deep integration of doctrine with social ethics. He insisted that faith must manifest in concrete moral action, declaring, "Do not adorn the church and ignore your afflicted brother... Give him the honor prescribed in his law by giving your riches to the poor. For God does not want golden vessels but golden hearts."[424] Chrysostom's theology of stewardship viewed wealth as a divine trust meant for communal benefit. Adalbert Hamman affirms, "Chrysostom's sermons puts theological orthopraxis into the limelight and the necessity of healing broken social relationships. His key teachings emphasize on the importance of communal well-being, stewardship, and the interconnectedness of wealth and humanity."[425] Spiritual integrity, for Chrysostom, is compromised when material abundance coexists with neglect of the poor. As Hamman recounts:

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[422] Origen, *On First Principles, trans. John Doe* (New York: Academic Press, 2025), 45.
[423] Ronald E. Heine, "The Fathers of the Church: Origen - Homilies on Genesis and Exodus", retrieved from https://www.scribd.com/document/722452177/Origen-Homilies-on-Genesis-and-Exodus (accessed 27/01/2025).
[424] John Chrysostom, "Homily on Feeding and Clothing the Poor," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, 10*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888).
[425] Adalbert Hamman, "The Social Morality of John Chrysostom: The Contribution of Adalbert Hamman (1910-2000)," *Journal Oriental Christian Periodicals* (1975): 649-660, 650.

> For you, the Father has not spared his own Son, his only born Son; yet you disregard this Son when he dies of hunger. God has given his own Son to us, and you have not given even a crumb of bread to him who has been immolated and delivered up to you. "Do you give to the poor?" What you give is not yours but your master's, common to you and your fellow-servants.[426]

Chrysostom taught that inequality and poverty are moral failures, not economic inevitabilities. He stated, "Inequality and poverty are consequences of evil. Wealth becomes morally acceptable only when used for the common good… Everything ultimately belongs to God... True ownership... arises when possessions are used to benefit the needy."[427] He viewed the rich as stewards, accountable for using their resources to uphold justice. Through vivid contrasts, he condemned moral complacency:

> You eat to excess; Christ eats not even what He needs. You eat to variety of cakes; He eats not even a piece of dried bread. You drink fine wine; but on Him you have not bestowed so much as a cup of cold water. You lie on a soft and embroidered bed; but He is perishing in the cold… At the moment, you have taken possession of the resources that belong to Christ and you assume them aimlessly.[428]

John Chrysostom, drawing from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, warns against the spiritual dangers of luxury, urging moderation and ethical stewardship. He identifies four key moral lessons: *first*, luxury leads to spiritual forgetfulness, "Fill your belly so moderately that you may not become too heavy to bend your knees and call upon your God"; *second*, earthly goods must serve spiritual ends, "We do not live, in order to eat and drink; but we eat in order to live"; *third*, the rich who hoard wealth are likened to robbers burying others' goods; and *fourth*, wealth does not equate to blessedness, "Let us not therefore call them fortunate because of what they have, but miserable because of what will come."[429] Chrysostom insists that true devotion

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[426] Adalbert G – Hamman, *The Mass: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts 1910-2000* (New York: Alba House publications, 1967), 30; Cf. John Chrysostom, in his "Homilies on the Letter to the Romans 15" delves into profound theological discussions, especially emphasizing on the moral teachings and social responsibilities of Christians. See also, Eugenia Scarvelis, "St. John Chrysostom as an interpreter of the New Testament: three exegetical principles," retrieved from https://ixtheo.de/Record/1155426487 (accessed 24/01/2025); Cf. Homily on St. John 30.3," in *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. XIV, St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. P. Schaff (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 118; Cf. Adalbert Hamman, "The Social Morality of John Chrysostom: The Contribution of Adalbert Hamman (1910-2000)" in *Journal Oriental Christian Periodicals* (1975): 649-660, 650.

[427] John Chrysostom, "The Universal Destination of Goods," retrieved from https://catholicmoraltheology.com/the-universal-destination-of-goods-in-st-john-chrysostom/ (31/05/2024).

[428] John Chrysostom, "On Mathew: Homily 48.6," in *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. X, See also St. John Chrysostom: *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Mathew*, Philip Schaff (eds.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, 301.

[429] Jordan J. Ballor, "John Chrysostom, On Wealth and Poverty, part 1," retrieved from https://rlo.acton.org/archives/1788-john-chrysostom-on-wealth-and-poverty-part-1.html (accessed 22/01/2025).

lies not in outward religious display but in justice, humility, and concrete compassion toward the poor: "It is in the poor that Christians must pay homage to Christ's body by responding to the needs of the distressed, who are the suffering members of his body. So, all people are invited to live their Christian calling by fulfilling and living their obligation to aid the needy, contrast between luxury and poverty, to live ethical behaviour rooted in Christ, avoid dangers of ignoring the poor and learn a lessons from the rich man and Lazarus."[430] True devotion, he taught, is expressed through justice, humility, and care for the vulnerable.

4.3.2 Augustine of Hippo on Morality, Conscience and Nature of Sin

Augustine of Hippo firmly opposed moral relativism, grounding ethical truth in God's eternal and immutable law. He affirmed that "individuals are equipped to discern right from wrong and are better prepared to exercise their free will judiciously. The basis of right and wrong is not contingent upon cultural norms, personal inclinations, or situational circumstances. Instead, morality is anchored in God's eternal and unchanging law."[431] His famous line from Confessions, "You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you,"[432] reflects his belief that moral fulfillment lies in divine alignment. Conscience, for Augustine, is ""the internal faculty through which individuals recognize divine truth… the innate law of God in our hearts,"[433] though he acknowledged sin's power to distort moral judgment. He defined sin as "a turning away from God and a misuse of free will…,"[434] emphasizing that free will must be aided by grace to achieve moral restoration.

In City of God, Augustine critiques societal ethics rooted in pride and ambition, stating, "Human beings, though endowed with free will, often misuse their freedom by choosing temporal goods over divine wisdom, thereby corrupting their moral integrity. Free will is a tool granted by God, enabling humans to navigate their lives towards the ultimate truth, God Himself."[435]Augustine further states that "This journey often necessitates the assistance of divine

[430] St. John Chrysostom, *On Mathew: Homily* 50.4, 313.
[431] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will, trans. Peter King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22.
[432] Augustine, *Confessions, trans. Albert C. Outler* (New York: Image Books, 1960), 3.
[433] Augustine, *Confessions, trans. and ed. Albert C. Outler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 22.
[434] Ronald Rentner, "*Theology and Spirituality: How Does Augustine Define Sin* (Christian.net, February 10, 2024)," retrieved from https://christian.net/theology-and-spirituality/how-does-augustine-define-sin/#augustine'search/ (accessed 30/05/2025).
[435] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will, trans. Peter King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26, 17.

grace… to guide individuals towards virtuous living and spiritual enlightenment. Human free will, left to its own devices, is often inclined towards selfish desires and sin due to the original sin that taints human nature, causing an inherent weakness that makes individuals prone to moral failings."[436] Divine grace, however, acts as a transformative force that elevates human will, guiding it towards good and away from evil. Augustine articulates a balance between human freedom and the necessity of grace as the means of spiritual renewal and moral integrity.

In City of God, Augustine offers a theological critique of the Roman moral order, which he saw as driven by pride, ambition, and human custom rather than divine justice. His rebuke is encapsulated in the statement: "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale?"[437] This underscores his conviction that moral collapse is inevitable when justice is divorced from God's eternal order. As the Divine Narratives Team explains: "Morality is grounded in God's eternal law rather than human conventions or subjective preferences. Righteousness and justice are not defined by cultural norms or personal opinions but by the immutable nature of God…[438] In City of God, Augustine critiques the Roman moral system, which he saw as "being based on glory, pride, and shifting human traditions, contrasting it with the heavenly city founded on unchanging divine truth."[439] Augustine's reflections on morality are deeply informed by his personal struggles.

As Adalbert Hamman writes, "Augustine before confession was obsessed with sexual immoralities… questioning his place in the world, even worrying about his future."[440] John C. Kelly "Before his conversion, Augustine's view on objective moral truths was heavily influenced by his engagement with Manichaeism, which posited a dualistic struggle between good and evil."[441] He struggled with moral relativism, often questioning the nature of good and evil and his place in the world. After conversion, Augustine decisively rejected relativism and affirmed that

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[436] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will,* 17.
[437] Augustine, *City of God, trans. Henry Bettenson* (London: Penguin Classics, 1972), Book IV, Chapter 4.
[438] DivineNarratives Team, "Augustine's Four States of Human Will: Sin, Fall, Redemption, Glory," retrieved from https://divinenarratives.org/augustines-four-states-of-human-will-sin-fall-redemption-glory/ (accessed 29/05/2025); Cf, Augustine, *City of God, Vol. 2 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series,* (ed.), Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 6.
[439] Augustine, *City of God, Vol. 2 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series,* (ed.), Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 6.
[440] Adalbert Hamman, "The Social Morality of John Chrysostom: The Contribution of Adalbert Hamman (1910-2000)," *Journal Oriental Christian Periodicals* (1975): 649-660, 650.
[441] John C. Kelly, "The Conversion of Saint Augustine," retrieved from https://earlychurchhistory.org/beliefs-2/the-conversion-of-saint-augustine/ (accessed 21/02/2025).

"Objective moral truths are immutable and universal, such that certain actions are intrinsically right or wrong."[442] His ethical vision extends beyond the personal to include a call to social justice. Hector Scerri emphasizes this, noting:

> When those who were excessively rich gave alms, their action was none another than a restitution to the poor. It was hypocrisy to celebrate the Eucharist or preach about it, and simultaneously shun the duty of fighting against those forms of misery which eroded the dignity of the human person. Eucharist offers Christians an invitation to participate in the creation of a renewed society.[443]

Augustine's critique of economic injustice carries implications for leadership in Kilifi County and beyond. He calls for integrity, justice, and compassion in governance, urging those in authority to prioritize the common good. His theology affirms that helping the poor is a crucial factor in our entrance into the Kingdom of God, stating:

> Christians and all people of good will are called to share in one another's joys and sorrows, as Christ shares in theirs, because they are joined together in Christ as one body. Thus, even those whose lives are relatively blessed cannot be happy while others in their community suffer. Heaven is a place where felicity is shared. He continued, fear Christ above; recognize Him below. Have Christ above bestowing His bounty, recognize Him here in the needy. Here He is poor, there He is rich.[444]

In City of God, Augustine affirms that lasting fulfillment lies in the divine, not in temporal success. He warns that "any exaltation of the earthly city and its values to absolute status as false and destructive…Man's ultimate destiny lies beyond the earthly city, beyond this perishing life, in the transcendent God who created him; …Happy is he who has God."[445] Augustine's moral and spiritual vision offers not only hope but a practical framework for ethical resilience. His journey from inner conflict to spiritual wisdom illustrates that transformation is possible, regardless of past failings. As John Paschal Bane states, "We are happy, wise and virtuous if we

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[442] John Paschal Bane, "The Moral Theory and Applied Ethics of Saint Augustine of Hippo as Presented in the Gospel of John and in the Epistle of John to the Parthians," retrieved from https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5039/ (accessed 21/02/2025).

[443] Hector Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria: Interrelated Themes in Patristic Sacramental Theology* (Malta: Melita Theologica Supplementary Series, 1999), 197.

[444] Augustine of Hippo, "The City of God," retrieved from https://pdfarchived.net/docs/saint-augustine-the-city-of-god-4917129 (accessed 24/01/2025). See also St. Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 73.4," in *A Selected Library of the Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Vol. VI;* Cf. Saint Augustine of Hippo: *Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies of the Gospels,* (eds.), Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 473.

[445] Augustine of Hippo, "The Happy Life (De Beata Vita)," retrieved from https://www.scribd.com/document/411397059/The-Happy-Life-De-Beata-Vita-St-Augustine (accessed 24/01/2025). Cf. Nick Needham, Augustine of Hippo: The Relevance of His Life and Thought Today, *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (2008), 38-50, 45.

turn to or convert to God. But if we turn away from Him and direct our attention and love to our bodies, we become miserable, foolish and wicked. True happiness arises from a life centered on God."[446] By aligning their will with divine wisdom and pursuing justice and love, young people can lead lives of purpose and moral clarity, contributing to the common good in both church and society.

4.4 The Medieval Moral Theologians on Moral Relativism

Medieval moral theologians firmly rejected moral relativism, asserting that moral law is universal, objective, and grounded in God's eternal will. Drawing on both reason and revelation, figures such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Peter Abelard, and Peter Lombard emphasized that true morality transcends personal opinion and cultural context. They upheld divine law as the ultimate standard for ethical behavior, providing a coherent framework for moral order in both individual and societal life.

4.4.1Thomas Aquinas on Divine Governance, Law and Moral Truths

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was a medieval philosopher and theologian whose work profoundly shaped Christian thought, particularly in the areas of divine governance, law, and morality. His synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy with Christian doctrine established a framework that continues to influence ethical and legal discussions today.

4.4.1.1 Divine Governance

Thomas Aquinas's concept of divine governance centers on the belief that God, through providence, directs all things toward their ultimate end, ensuring harmony within creation. He states that "Divine governance is the manner in which God directs all things toward their ultimate purpose, ensuring harmony within creation. It is the ultimate order imposed by God upon creation, ensuring that all things move toward their intended purpose."[447] In Summa Theologica I, q.103, Aquinas rejects the notion that the world operates by chance, affirming that observable patterns in nature reflect a rational, divine order. He emphasizes that "this governance

[446] John Paschal Bane, "The Moral Theory and Applied Ethics of Saint Augustine of Hippo as Presented in the Gospel of John and in the Epistle of John to the Parthians," retrieved from https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5039/ (accessed 21/02/2025).
[447] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, 1a, Q. 103, a. 1.*

is necessary for the fulfillment of all things according to their intended ends."[448] Aquinas explains that all aspects of creation, spiritual and material, are ordered by divine wisdom, with secondary causes functioning under God's guidance. Ultimately, he affirms that "while creatures possess distinct operations, they remain within the framework of divine governance, which sustains and directs all existence toward its proper fulfillment."[449] His natural law theory affirms that true morality stems from rational alignment with divine order, rejecting relativism in favor of universal moral truths.

4.4.1.2 Law

Thomas Aquinas, in *Summa Theologica* (I–II, Q.90–94), defines law as "an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated."[450] He identifies four types of law: eternal law as God's divine governance; natural law as moral truths accessible through reason; human law as societal regulations derived from natural law; and divine law as revealed guidance for salvation."[451] These reflect Aquinas's belief, as Dimmock and Fisher note, "universal moral laws, arguing that they apply to all rational beings, regardless of time, place, or culture."[452] Rejecting moral relativism, Aquinas integrates Aristotelian logic, virtue ethics, and metaphysics into Christian theology, asserting that reason discerns moral truths grounded in God's eternal law. As he famously stated, "To love is to will the good of the other."[453] Richard Kraut describes Aristotelianism as "a school of thought emphasizing logic, empirical observation, and the pursuit of knowledge through reason,"[454] which Aquinas adapted to support his ethical framework.

4.4.1.3 Morality

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) integrates Aristotelian ethics with Christian theology, grounding morality in natural law and human reason. He asserts, "An act is good or bad depending on whether it contributes to or deters us from our proper human end, the telos or final

[448] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Part I, Q. 22.*
[449] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, Q. 103–119.
[450] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I-II, Q. 90–94.
[451]Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*, Part I–II, Q. 90–94.
[452] Mark Dimmock & Andrew Fisher, "Chapter 37, Aquinas's Natural Law Theory," retrieved from https://viva.pressbooks.pub/phi220ethics/chapter/ch4/ (accessed 31/01/2025).
[453] *Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II, q.26, a.6.*
[454] Richard Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics - The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy," retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/ (accessed 22/02/2025).

goal at which all human actions aim. That telos is *eudaimonia*, or happiness, where "happiness" is understood in terms of completion, perfection, or well-being."[455] Achieving this end requires cultivating cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude) and theological virtues (faith, hope, charity). Yet Aquinas maintains that true happiness, beatitude is found only in supernatural union with God, beyond natural human capacity. Aquinas believes that we can never achieve complete or final happiness in this life. For him, final happiness consists in beatitude, or supernatural union with God. Such an end lies far beyond what we through our natural human capacities can attain.

Aquinas believed: "We not only need the virtues, we also need God to transform our nature, to perfect it so that we might be suited to participate in divine beatitude. We inherited inclination to sin from our first parent, Adam. While our nature is not wholly corrupted by sin, it is nevertheless diminished by sin's stain, as evidenced by the fact that our wills are at enmity with God's."[456] Thus, we need God's help in order to restore the good of our nature and bring us into conformity with his will. Rejecting moral relativism, Aquinas affirms:

> Human conduct must follow certain principles found in nature, universal and fixed principles. These principles are universal and fixed. That is, they apply to everyone, everywhere, all of the time. As humans, we have the ability to reason and work out what these principles are. His theory is deontological, meaning it is only concerned with human action; not the result or consequence of that action. The central principle of natural law is that "Good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided. In other words, "do good and avoid evil.[457]

Using this as the overriding guiding principle, we as humans must use our reason to work out what is the right action. Aquinas asserts: "Human reason, guided by divine wisdom, allows individuals to discern right from wrong. Certain actions, such as murder and theft, are inherently wrong, regardless of societal opinions."[458] In *Summa Theologiae* (Prima Secundae, Q.1–5), he writes, "all human actions are directed toward an end… True happiness is only fully realized in the afterlife, where the soul is united with God."[459] Aquinas concludes, "Habits or dispositions enable human beings to act in accordance with natural law. They are essential for achieving the

[455] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 90–97.
[456] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I-II, Question 90-94.
[457] Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologica, Part I-II, Question 94, Article 2.
[458] Marian Hillar, "The Justification of Morals in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," in *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, (ed.), M. Hillar & H. Leuchtag (American Humanist Association, 1992), 21–40.
[459] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a-2ae, q. 1, a. 1.

ultimate goal of human life, which is union with God."[460] His framework offers youth a rational and spiritual foundation for ethical living, rooted in virtue, reason, and grace.

Aquinas's teachings offer a moral foundation that transcends cultural diversity, guiding them toward ethical consistency and virtue. His rejection of moral relativism reinforces the importance of objective moral truths, ensuring that ethical standards remain consistent despite diverse societal influences. By cultivating virtues such as prudence, justice, and temperance, young people can navigate complex moral dilemmas, whether in matters of integrity, peer relationships, or social responsibility. His emphasis on reason highlights the role of informed moral decision-making, enabling youth to critically assess cultural practices and adopt values that promote long-term well-being. Furthermore, his advocacy for divine grace encourages spiritual resilience, helping young people maintain ethical integrity amid societal pressures. In embracing Aquinas's teachings, youth in Kilifi County can foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue, build a cohesive and morally upright society, and contribute to a community rooted in justice and ethical stability.

4.4.2 Peter Abelard: Intention as the Core of Moral Judgment

Peter Abelard's moral philosophy centers on intention as the defining criterion of ethical judgment. He contends that moral value arises not from external actions but from the agent's internal motivation. As Paul Vincent Spade explains, "Abelard did not explicitly discuss moral relativism as we understand it today but focused on moral responsibility and the intentions behind actions. He believed that moral goodness was defined by the intention to show love for God and neighbour, with individuals accountable for their actions based on these intentions."[461] Abelard's ethics reject imposed norms, emphasizing rational conscience and the will to love rightly.

Jacky Lovell clarifies that Abelard's intentionalism avoids subjectivism through natural law: "Abelard's radically intentionalist view of ethics nonetheless does not collapse into mere subjectivism, thanks to the presence of natural law, discoverable by reason and instituted by God. This is what allows us to discover what is right in our conscience and to ensure that we

[460] Thomas Aquinas, "Thomas Aquinas: Moral Philosophy," retrieved from https://iep.utm.edu/thomasaquinas-moral-philosophy/ (accessed 31/01/2025); Joseph Pierre, "St. Thomas Aquinas's Ethics," retrieved from https://philonotes.com/2023/04/st-thomas-aquinass-ethics (accessed 31/01/2025).
[461] Paul Vincent Spade, "Abelard: Ethical Writings," retrieved from https://historyofphilosophy.net/abelard-ethics (accessed 31/01/2025).

have knowledge of what is good in God's eyes."[462] Abelard emphasizes the interior dimension of moral life, focusing on the psychology of the embodied individual rather than on legalistic prescriptions. Abelard affirms that moral discernment is rooted in conscience and divine insight, stating, "The law itself comes in, only insofar as it, its primary precept is 'to do unto others as you would have done unto you,'"[463] referencing both reason and scripture (Mt. 7:12). His framework integrates intention, reason, and divine law, offering a lasting model for ethical reflection.

4.4.3 Peter Lombard: Free Will and the Rejection of Moral Relativism

Peter Lombard, a distinguished medieval theologian widely recognized as the "Master of the Sentences," extensively explored the concept of human free will in his seminal work, *Sententiarum Libri Quatuor*,[464] emphasizing its compatibility with divine omniscience. He defined free will as "that power or capacity that enables human beings to perform their actions freely,"[465] maintaining that despite God's foreknowledge, individuals remain morally accountable. Kevin Timpe reinforces this, stating free will is "the capacity of an agent to choose their own course of action,"[466] emphasizing that moral responsibility rests on an individual's ability to make deliberate and conscious choices. Lombard philosophy emphasized on the importance of moral behaviour and the pursuit of virtues. He believed that individuals had free will and the moral obligation to act in accordance with the teaching of the church and natural law and that, cultivation of virtues were essential for achieving salvation."[467] His framework affirms ethical responsibility as rooted in rational autonomy rather than external compulsion.

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[462] Jack Lovell, "Peter Abelard's Ethics in Overview," retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/6020571/Peter_Abelards_Ethics_in_Overview (accessed 01/02/2025).
[463] Jack Lovell, "Peter Abelard's Ethics in Overview," retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/6020571/Peter_Abelards_Ethics_in_Overview (accessed 01/02/2025).
[464] Peter Lombard, "Peter Lombard, criticism: Introduction," retrieved from https://www.enotes.com/topics/peter-lombard/criticism/introduction (accessed 01/01/2025). His work known as "'Sentences' was a compilation of theological teaching and arguments that become a standard text in medieval universities."
[465] Peter Lombard, "Medieval Theories of Free Will – Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Individual Theories – Sentences Commentaries," retrieved from https://iep.utm.edu/freewi-m/#SH3 (accessed 23/02/2025).
[466] Kevin Timpe, "Free Will - Lombard philosophy," retrieved from https://iep.utm.edu/freewill/ (accessed 23/02/2025).
[467]Kevin Timpe, "Free Will - Lombard philosophy," retrieved from https://iep.utm.edu/freewill/ (accessed 23/02/2025).

Lombard's theology also underscores Scripture and Church tradition as sources of absolute moral truth. Stephen F. Brown and Samuel Fleischacker note "Peter Lombard's teachings highlight the importance of adhering to the Scripture and Church teaching which provide absolute moral Fleischacker adds, truths derived from Divine Revelation rather than relative or subjective moral standards."[468] Fleischacker adds that "certain moral principles, rooted in Divine Revelation, transcend temporal and cultural variations."[469] Revelations illuminate the place of morality while presupposing that their adherents already know what they need to know about the content of morality. Lombard maintained: "The Church plays a vital role in promoting justice and protecting the marginalized. As an institution the Church has a responsibility to protect the poor and marginalized members of the society, working together towards building a more just and equitable society. The Scriptures provide a firm foundation for discerning ethical behaviour amidst the cacophony of competing narratives."[470] His sermons and advocacy for absolute moral truths offers a stabilizing force in a rapidly changing world. True moral wisdom lies in recognizing the enduring truths revealed by divine authority. His view on relativism invites a deeper reflection on the role of tradition and authority in shaping moral values.

The discussion provides a critical foundation for addressing moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi. By examining the views of Aquinas, Abelard, and Lombard, the study highlights a consistent rejection of relativism and affirms the existence of objective moral truths grounded in divine law, reason, and conscience. These perspectives are relevant in Kilifi, where many youths face ethical confusion due to cultural shifts, peer influence, and limited moral guidance. The medieval theologians offer a framework that emphasizes moral responsibility, virtue, and the role of intention, principles that can inform moral formation among the youth. Their insights support the study's argument that stable moral values are essential for shaping ethical behaviour and resisting the influence of relativistic attitudes in contemporary Kilifi society.

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[468] Stephen F. Brown, "Peter of Candia's Sermons in Praise of Peter Lombard," retrieved from https://www.enotes.com/topics/peter-lombard/criticism/criticism/stephen-f-brown-essay-date-1976 (accessed 01/01/2024).

[469] Samuel Fleischacker, "Divine Teaching and the Way of the World: A Defense of Revealed Religion, Chapter 3 Aspects of Revelation (I): Moral Teaching," retrieved from https://academic.oup.com/book/4625/chapter-abstract/146775547?redirectedFrom=fulltext (accessed 25/01/2025).

[470] Admin, "Lombard's Philosophy – Philo notes," retrieved from https://philonotes.com/2023/04/lombards-philosophy (accessed 02/02/2025).

4.5 The Church Magisterium and Moral Absolutism

The Catholic Church, through its Magisterium, affirms the existence of objective moral truths grounded in Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, and natural law, firmly rejecting moral relativism. It teaches that moral principles are universally binding and not subject to cultural or personal interpretation. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church declares, "The Church, the "pillar and bulwark of the truth," has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles to announce the saving truth… To announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgments on any human affairs to the extent ..."[471] This authoritative role obliges the Church to uphold ethical standards that safeguard human dignity and promote salvation. Popes St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have consistently emphasized this mission, warning against the erosion of truth through relativism and reaffirming the Church's responsibility to guide the faithful toward moral clarity.

4.5.1 Pope John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor on Moral Relativism*

Pope John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) offers a decisive response to moral relativism, affirming that true freedom is inseparable from divine truth. He warns, "In the depths of his heart there always remains a yearning for absolute truth and a thirst to attain full knowledge of it,"[472] emphasizing that human dignity and justice depend on universal moral norms. He cautions against societal confusion: "a headlong plunge into the most dangerous crisis which can afflict man: the confusion between good and evil ..."[473] which undermines moral order. The Church, he insists, must uphold immutable principles: "The Church's motherhood can never in fact be separated from her teaching mission… she never tires of proclaiming the moral norm... In obedience to the truth which is Christ."[474] John Paul II rejects ethical theories like proportionalism and consequentialism, stating: There are certain specific kinds of behaviour that are always wrong to choose, because choosing them involves a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil..."[475] He critiques proportionalism and consequentialism for encouraging moral ambiguity: "a moral theory that determines the rightness of an action by weighing its good and

[471] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2032.
[472] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, The Splendor of Truth (6 August 1993): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 85 (1993), no. 1.
[473] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 93.
[474] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 95.
[475] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor, no. 78.

bad consequences, rejecting the idea of absolute moral norms."[476] Each action is evaluated based on its circumstances and outcomes.

John Paul II's critique aligns with Thomas Berg's assessment of proportionalism as an "ends justify the means"[477] approach to moral reasoning. He reaffirms the Church's commitment to moral absolutism, emphasizing the inseparable link between freedom and truth. In a world where good is often entangled with evil, and every good effect linked to other evil effects, the Pope explains that "the morality of an act would be judged in two different ways: its moral "goodness" would be judged on the basis of the subject's intention in reference to moral goods, and its "rightness" on the basis of a consideration of its foreseeable effects or consequences and of their proportion. Consequently, concrete kinds of behaviour could be described as "right" or "wrong"…"[478] He warns that such reasoning threatens both society and the Church. Citing Vatican Council II, he identifies intrinsically evil acts such as:

> Whatever is hostile to life itself, such as any kind of homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide; whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit; whatever is offensive to human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat labourers as mere instruments of profit, and not as free responsible persons …[479]

In *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II articulates four foundational moral principles that counter relativism and offer clarity for youth. First, truth is knowable and formative. He affirms "The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God" (Gen.1:26). Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord."[480] Carl Olson adds, "Truth is what is real, understood through reason and correct judgment."[481] The Pope insists,

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[476] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 75.
[477] Thomas Berg, "The moral theory that failed – but is now back in fashion," retrieved from https://thecatholicherald.com/the-moral-theory-that-failed-but-is-now-back-in-fashion/ (accessed 05/02/2025).
[478] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 75.
[479] Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966): 1025-1115, no. 27; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 80.
[480] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 1.
[481] Carl E. Olson, "'*Veritatis Splendor'* at 30: Four Essential Truths Taught by St. Pope John Paul II," retrieved from https://www.simplycatholic.com/veritatis-splendor-at-30-four-essential-truths-taught-by-st-pope-john-paul-ii/#:~:text=%E2%80%98Veritatis%20Splendor%E2%80%99%20at%2030%3A%20Four%20essential%20truths%20taught,4%204.%20One%E2%80%99s%20conscience%20judges%20an%20act.%20 (accessed 09/02/2025).

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."[482] Faith and reason are both essential and complementary pathways for understanding ultimate truth. Just as a bird needs both wings to fly, the human spirit relies on belief and intellect working together to seek and embrace divine wisdom.

Second, Christ is the true light who dispels moral darkness. John Paul II teaches, "Man's capacity to know the truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened."[483] He points to Christ's promise, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32).[484] The Pope urges believers to "see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, freeing man from what curtails, diminishes, and breaks off this freedom at its root… and his conscience."[485] Christ helps us see truth clearly and live freely by guiding our conscience and moral choices. His light breaks through the confusion caused by sin and helps us choose what is right.

Third, freedom finds its fulfillment in choosing the good. The Pope defines authentic freedom as "an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in man. For God willed to leave man in the power of his own counsel so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God."[486] This principle calls youth to exercise freedom responsibly, aligning personal choices with divine truth and the common good. Authentic freedom is realized by living in accordance with God's law, fostering social harmony and justice.

Lastly, *conscience is the inner voice of truth.* The term "conscience" appears 108 times. John Paul II describes conscience as "God's herald and messenger,"[487] and emphasizes that "a well-formed conscience aligns with the moral law and helps individuals discern right from wrong, thus making it the object of a continuous conversion to what is true and to what is

[482] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason (14 September 1998): *Acta Apostoliae Sedis*, 91(7 January 1999), 5-88, no. 1.
[483] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 1.
[484] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 30.
[485] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, On Redemption and the Dignity of the Human Race (March 4, 1979): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979), 3-45, no. 35.
[486] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 34.
[487] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 58 & 32.

good."[488] This principle empowers youth to cultivate ethical integrity through truth-guided conscience particularly in a pluralistic context like Kilifi County.

4.5.2 Pope Benedict XVI on Relativism

Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2005 conclave homily, warned against the "dictatorship of relativism," a concept that challenges the existence of absolute truths and promote the idea that moral values are subjective…"[489] He argues that this dictatorship leads to a society where personal desires override objective moral values, ultimately resulting in a lack of definitive principles to guide human behaviour. Benedict XVI emphasized that moral truths transcend individual or societal preferences. He observed: "Today, having a clear faith based on the creed of the Church is often labeled fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, letting oneself be tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine, seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times."[490] This concept describes a cultural climate in which objective truths are dismissed and moral standards are replaced by personal preferences. As he cautioned that, "we are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely in satisfying one's ego and desires, resulting in a loss of moral clarity."[491] His concern reflects a broader ecclesial response to the erosion of ethical foundations and the need to reaffirm universal moral principles rooted in faith and reason.

Benedict XVI warns that this mindset rejects lasting standards and instead promotes a lifestyle centered on personal satisfaction. The consequence is a blurred sense of right and wrong, leaving individuals without stable moral direction. He further described the cultural consequences of relativism: "In a world dominated by relativism, a new paganism increasingly shapes thoughts and actions… Numerous ideologies sway Christians, challenging fidelity to the deposit of faith, now dismissed as 'fundamentalist.' The small boat of Christian thought is tossed between Marxism, liberalism, libertinism, collectivism, individualism, atheism… and

[488] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor,* no. 64.
[489] Benedict XVI, "The Dictatorship of Relativism: A Conversation with Peter Seewald," retrieved from https://lst.edu/articles/the-dictatorship-of-relativism-pope-benedict-xvi/ (accessed 11/02/2025).
[490] Benedict XVI, "Mass, Homily of His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger Dean of the College of Cardinals," retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html (accessed 28/01/2025).
[491] Benedict XVI, "Mass, Homily of His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger Dean of the College of Cardinals," retrieved from https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html (accessed 28/01/2025).

syncretism."[492] He warns that moral relativism opens the door to a wide range of conflicting ideologies that blur spiritual truth and undermine faith. He uses the image of a "small boat" to show how Christian beliefs are being swept around by political, philosophical, and religious currents, making it harder to stay rooted in the Gospel. He warns "when Christ's sovereignty is contested, other 'gods'"[493] take His place.

4.5.3 Pope Francis on Moral Relativism

Pope Francis consistently warns that moral relativism threatens truth, ethical responsibility, and social cohesion. Though not addressed in a formal treatise, his speeches and writings emphasize that a culture lacking objective moral values fosters confusion and undermines unity. Catherine Harmon summarizes Pope Francis's message on moral relativism, quoting his description of it as "spiritual poverty of our time… the 'tyranny of relativism' which makes everyone his own criterion and endangers the coexistence of peoples."[494] Francis views relativism as a corrosive force that replaces shared moral foundations with subjective preferences. He calls for renewed commitment to universal principles that uphold human dignity and promote justice. He affirms:

> There is no true peace without truth!" There cannot be peace if everyone is his own criterion, if everyone can always claim exclusively his own rights, without at the same time caring for the good of others, of everyone, on the basis of the nature that unites every human being on this earth … it is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God. But the converse is also true: It is not possible to build true links with God while ignoring other people.[495]

He further cautions against the seductive appeal of relativism: "The deceptive light of relativism, obscuring the splendor of truth and shaking the earth beneath our feet, pushing us towards the shifting sands of confusion and despair."[496] This warning is especially relevant for

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[492] Pope Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, The Church and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 50 & 54.

[493] Professor Tracey Rowland, "The Struggle Against the "Dictatorship of Relativism," retrieved from https://www.benedictusxvi.com/homilies/the-dictatorship-of-relativism-and-the-measure-of-true-humanism/the-struggle-against-the-dictatorship-of-relativism-by-professor-tracey-rowland (accessed 11/01/2025).

[494] Catherine Harmon, "Video: Pope Francis says Moral Relativism is "The Spiritual Poverty of Our Time," retrieved from https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2013/03/22/video-pope-francis-says-moral-relativism-is-the-spiritual-poverty-of-our-time/ (accessed 17/02/2025).

[495] Rebecca Hamilton, "Pope Francis on Moral Relativism and Being Our Own Criterion," retrieved from https://www.patheos.com/blogs/publiccatholic/2013/03/pope-francis-on-moral-relativism-and-being-our-own-criterion/ (accessed 24/02/2025).

[496] Pope Francis, "Countering Moral Relativism: "The Spiritual Poverty of Our Time," retrieved from https://cacatholic.org/news/countering-moral-relativism-spiritual-poverty-our-time/ (accessed 04/01/2025).

youth, who face increasing exposure to ideologies that blur the line between truth and opinion. As Tom Beauchamp notes, "moral relativism distorts the concept of sin by making moral choices entirely subjective, allowing individuals to justify actions based on personal preference rather than ethical responsibility."[497] Pope Francis ultimately calls for a return to truth and ethical integrity. He critiques the illusion of freedom as self-indulgence, reminding us that "the happiness people believe they will achieve by doing anything they want often proves to be elusive, resulting in internal emptiness."[498] For the young people, embracing objective moral truths offers stability amid cultural flux, guiding them toward integrity, purpose, and constructive engagement with their community.

The Church Magisterium's unwavering stance against moral relativism, as articulated through the teachings of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. Their teachings offers the youth in Kilifi Deanery a stable moral compass in a rapidly shifting world. Faced with conflicting ideologies, cultural pressures, and ethical uncertainty, these teachings affirm that truth is not a matter of personal preference but a divine reality accessible through faith, reason, and a well-formed conscience. Pope John Paul II's defense of moral absolutes, Benedict XVI's critique of ideological confusion, and Pope Francis's emphasis on human dignity and social responsibility together call young people to resist the temptation of self-centered ethics. Instead, they are invited to anchor their freedom in truth, build their identity on unchanging moral values, and contribute to a just and coherent society rooted in objective good. In this way, the Magisterium empowers them not just to withstand relativism, but to become ethical leaders within their communities.

4.6 Contemporary Critiques and Defenses of Moral Relativism

Moral relativism continues to provoke intense philosophical debate in the modern era, raising fundamental questions about the nature of truth, ethics, and human dignity. James Rachels writes that "While critics contend that it erodes the foundations of objective morality and undermines ethical coherence, its defenders argue that it promotes tolerance, pluralism, and

[497] Tom Beauchamp, "Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy," retrieved from https://archive.org/details/philosophicaleth0000beau (accessed 31/01/2025).
[498] Pope Francis, "Countering Moral Relativism: "The Spiritual Poverty of Our Time," retrieved from https://cacatholic.org/news/countering-moral-relativism-spiritual-poverty-our-time/ (accessed 24/01/2025).

cultural sensitivity."[499] This section engages with pivotal voices of Jonathan Sacks, Noam Chomsky, John Finnis, Germain Grisez, William E. May, and Cardinal Carlo Caffara, who offer significant critiques and counterpoints, shaping the discourse on whether morality is universally grounded or contextually defined.

4.6.1 Jonathan Sacks: A Moral Voice in a Fragmented World

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, renowned moral philosopher and former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth (1991–2013), offered a powerful critique of moral relativism, highlighting its impact on social cohesion and ethical responsibility. In *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*, he expresses concern over the shift from collective moral frameworks to individualism and subjective ethics. Sacks writes:

> There can be no such thing as a private language. Or to give a simpler example: there can be no such thing as a game of football for one. Morality, like language and football, is a social practice. It is the set of values, virtues, customs and codes that create and sustain communities. It is what turns a group of disconnected "I"s into a collective "We." He argues that when morality becomes purely subjective, it leads to ethical uncertainty and fragmentation, weakening the bonds that hold communities together. To counter this, he advocated for a moral framework anchored in universal principles, essential for sustaining justice and harmony in society.[500]

Sacks argues that when morality becomes purely subjective, it leads to ethical uncertainty and fragmentation, weakening the bonds that hold communities together. To counter this, he advocated for a moral framework anchored in universal principles, essential for sustaining justice and harmony in society. He emphasizes that morality is a social imperative, not a personal preference, stating:

> Morality is not an option. It's an essential. It is what allows us to get on with one another… is what broadens our perspective beyond the self and its desires. It places us in the midst of a collective social order. Morality has always been about the first-person plural, about "We." "Society," said Lord Devlin, "means a community of ideas; without shared ideas on politics, morals, and ethics, no society can exist." Society is constituted by a shared morality.[501]

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[499] James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 22 & 29.
[500] Jonathan Sacks, "Five Things I Have Learned about Morality in the 21st Century," *The Rabbi Sacks Legacy*, October 1, 2019.
[501] Jonathan Sacks, *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 11 & 26.

Sacks critiques moral relativism, arguing that it weakens the shared moral foundations necessary for a stable society. His perspective underscores the importance of maintaining a collective moral vision in an era of increasing individualism. In his article “Five Things I Have Learned about Morality in the 21st Century,” Sacks reflects on how contemporary society has shifted from a communal "We" to an individualistic "I" culture, weakening shared moral commitments. He critiques the outsourcing of morality to the market and the state, emphasizing that ethical values must be actively upheld within communities rather than treated as subjective choices. His insights reinforce the necessity of a universal moral foundation to restore social cohesion and ensure justice in an increasingly fragmented world. He writes: Sacks identifies five key shifts that have shaped modern moral discourse:

> First, Trust in corporations and governments has plummeted. Second, Smartphones and social media are becoming addictive and having a bad effect on teenagers (and adults too), who are spending between seven and nine hours a day looking at a screen. The longer you spend on social media, the more miserable you become. Third, we have moved from being a “We” society: “We are all in this together”, to an “I” society: “I am free to be whatever I choose.” The bad news is that this leaves people vulnerable and alone. The good news is that we can turn it around and become a “We” society again. Fourth, by taking responsibility, and refusing to see ourselves as victims. Fifth, the need to reclaim moral responsibility.[502]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’s reflections are especially relevant to youth in Kilifi, who are increasingly shaped by digital culture, individualism, and weakened trust in institutions. His critique reveals how a shift from shared ethical commitments to personal autonomy leaves young people vulnerable and socially disconnected. The pervasive influence of social media and the decline of collective responsibility contribute to a culture of isolation and moral uncertainty. Sacks urges a return to a “We” society grounded in moral responsibility, where youth actively participate in shaping ethical communities. In Kilifi’s context, this calls for renewed efforts to foster solidarity, accountability, and communal values that restore purpose and cohesion in a fragmented moral landscape.

[502] Jonathan Sacks, "Five Things I Have Learned about Morality in the 21st Century," *The Rabbi Sacks Legacy*, October 1, 2019.

4.6.2 Noam Chomsky: Innate Morality and the Limits of Relativism

Noam Chomsky, a leading intellectual in linguistics and ethics, critiques moral relativism by grounding morality in universal cognitive structures intrinsic to human nature. He argues that ethical reasoning is not merely shaped by culture but emerges from innate faculties, stating that human nature is "clearly social insofar as its finality is not merely functional at the level of the individual human organism, but constructive of the collective aspirations of the human polity."[503] Like language, morality arises from deep-seated cognitive mechanisms, making extreme relativism "an incoherent position,"[504] as it overlooks biological constraints that shape moral development. While acknowledging cultural diversity, Chomsky maintains that it operates within shared cognitive capacities. He explains, "Much like language, humans possess an innate moral capacity, which suggests that certain moral principles are universal rather than entirely subjective or culturally constructed."[505] This means that culture is closely connected to how people think and use language. The ways we express culture come from natural mental patterns, similar to how language forms in the human mind.

Chomsky further emphasizes that culture is "deeply intertwined with human cognition and language. He argues that cultural expressions emerge from innate cognitive structures, much like language development."[506] This supports his view that moral progress, such as rejecting slavery and oppression reflects deeper universal truths, and not arbitrary shifts. Chomsky also critiques how dominant powers manipulate cultural narratives, obscuring genuine moral insight. His nativist framework links language, cognition, and ethics, asserting:

> Morality is not purely a social construct but emerges from universal cognitive mechanisms. He also argues that moral relativism, if taken to mean that all moral perspectives are equally valid, undermines the possibility of ethical progress. For example, he points out that historical shifts such as the rejection of slavery and oppression suggest a deeper penetration into fundamental moral values rather than arbitrary cultural changes.[507]

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[503] Norman Madarasz & Daniel Santos, "The Concept of Human Nature in Noam Chomsky," *Veritas (Porto Alegre)* 63, no. 3 (2018): 1092–1126, 1095.
[504] Noam Chomsky, "Why Nobody Is Really a Moral Relativist, Even Michel Foucault," *Open Culture* (September 28, 2023).
[505] Noam Chomsky, interviewed by Wiktor Osiatynski, "On Language and Culture," in *Contrasts: Soviet and American Thinkers Discuss the Future*, ed. Wiktor Osiatynski (New York: MacMillan, 1984), 95–101.
[506] Noam Chomsky, interviewed by Wiktor Osiatynski, "On Language and Culture," in *Contrasts: Soviet and American Thinkers Discuss the Future*, (ed.), Wiktor Osiatynski (New York: MacMillan, 1984), 95–101.
[507] Noam Chomsky, "Why Nobody Is Really a Moral Relativist, Even Michel Foucault," *Open Culture* (September 28, 2023).

Noam Chomsky's view challenges the foundations of moral relativism. He argues that morality is rooted in shared human cognition, not just shaped by culture or tradition. This offers a stable base for ethical reflection across diverse settings. His ideas support the study's stance that objective moral principles exist. For youth facing complex influences, Chomsky's approach promotes choices guided by reason, conscience, and universal values.

4.6.3 John Finnis: Foundations of Natural Law and Moral Objectivity

John Finnis, a prominent legal philosopher, revitalizes classical natural law by defending moral absolutism and rejecting relativism. In Natural Law and Natural Rights, he argues that "the essence of natural law may be said to lie in the constant assertion that there are objective moral principles which depend upon the nature of the universe."[508] These principles, he maintains, are not cultural constructs but grounded in reality and accessible through reason. Finnis affirms that "certain ethical norms remain unchanging and universally valid, irrespective of individual or cultural perspectives,"[509] and links morality to basic human goods such as life, knowledge, and practical reasonableness. He warns that relativism undermines ethical coherence and asserts that "justice and human rights, is central to law, it is at the core of law as an idea."[510] Finnis's statement means that morality is built on ethical principles that apply universally, regardless of personal or cultural differences. These principles like justice, human rights, and the pursuit of basic human goods, form the foundation of a coherent legal and moral system, which moral relativism threatens to destabilize.

Finnis's work is highly relevant to the study as it reinforces the critique of moral relativism by defending the existence of objective moral norms. His natural law theory, grounded in human reason and intrinsic goods, affirms that ethical principles are not arbitrary or culturally relative but rooted in the very nature of human flourishing. This provides a stable framework for moral judgment, especially for youth navigating complex cultural influences and societal change. Finnis's emphasis on universal values like justice, human rights, and rational responsibility directly supports efforts to promote moral integrity and ethical leadership in Kilifi Deanery.

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[508] Alex E. Wallin, "John Finnis's Natural Law Theory and a Critique of the Incommensurable Nature of Basic Goods," *Campbell Law Review* 35, 1 (2012): 58-81, 59.

[509] John Finnis, "Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision, and Truth," retrieved from https://archive.org/details/moralabsolutestr0000finn/mode/2up (accessed 07/06/2025).

[510] John Keown and Robert P. George, *Reason, Morality, and Law: The Philosophy of John Finnis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 538.

4.6.3 Germain Grisez: Moral Norms and the Renewal of Natural Law

Germain Grisez, a Catholic philosopher and ethicist, advanced a modern interpretation of natural law grounded in moral absolutism and practical reason. He critiques consequentialism for treating human goods as commensurable, arguing: "Consequentialism's requirement that human goods be commensurable and determinative of moral judgments is flawed…"[511] Grisez insists that that certain acts, such as "adultery (contraception, abortion, etc.) is always morally wrong," and that "moral absolutes are specific moral norms which exclude acts of certain kinds universally."[512] He emphasizes that "Moral norms are truths which guide us to act in ways that fulfill us, both as individuals and as persons living together in community."[513] Rejecting proportionalism, Grisez warns that its logic leads one to "choose the one which promises to produce overall the most good or the least harm, even if that means… destroying, damaging, or impeding some instance of a basic human good.

Grisez argues, "Undermines the integrity of moral absolutes."[514] He defends the inviolability of moral goods through theological reasoning: "God is all-good, all-powerful, and all knowing; his loving providence extends to every creature, and nothing happens which he does not at least permit. God permits evil only because he sees how to bring good out of it."[515] He affirms the Church's teaching that "divine revelation includes truths of the natural law, for instance, the Ten Commandments."[516] Grisez links moral life to spiritual vision, stating: "It is necessary to see Jesus in others... to know moral truth and to have a right understanding of the relationship between this life and everlasting life."[517] His framework offers youth a principled foundation for ethical reasoning, personal dignity, and communal responsibility amid cultural change. In the contemporary society where youth grapple with intersecting influences of

[511] Germain Grisez, "Against Consequentialism," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 23, no. 1 (1978): 21–72, 45 & 55.
[512] Germain Grisez, "Moral Absolutes vs. Utilitarianism/Consequentialism/Proportionalism, The Way of the Lord Jesus," retrieved from https://www.catholicbridge.com/moral-theology/MoralAbsolutes.php (accessed 09/06/2025).
[513] Germain Grisez & Russell Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ: A Summary of Christian Moral Principles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 49.
[514] Germain Grisez & Russell Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ: A Summary of Christian Moral Principles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 61.
[515] Germain Grisez & Russell Shaw, Fulfillment in Christ, 67.
[516] Germain Grisez & Russell Shaw, Fulfillment in Christ, 76.
[517] Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus: Christian Moral Principles* 1 (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1983), 364.

tradition and global modernity, Grisez's reflection provides a principled path to justice, personal dignity, and communal flourishing.

4.6.4 William E. May on Objective Moral Norms

William E. May, a leading Catholic moral theologian, defends objective moral norms rooted in human nature and natural law. In Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life, he asserts that "moral truth is not subjective but rooted in fundamental principles that protect human dignity."[518] His theology affirms that, "moral norms, such as justice and fairness, are employed as a criterion for making an ethical judgment… they are truths, not arbitrary and legalistic decrees to guide human choices."[519] May emphasizes virtue and conscience, affirming that "Upright, virtuous men and women make true moral judgments and good moral choices in so far as doing so has become, as it were, second nature to them."[520] He links freedom to moral order, writing: "All human choice and action is directed to some end or purpose... the 'good' has the meaning of what is perfective of a being... good is to be done and pursued and its opposite, evil is to be avoided…"[521] May holds that some norms, such as prohibitions against killing innocents, are absolute: "they are grounded on the requirement that we ought not to choose to damage, destroy, or impede what is really good, and the life of an innocent person is really good."[522] His defense of moral absolutes reflects a commitment to the inviolable dignity of the human person, informed by natural law.

May further identifies a threefold understanding of human dignity: *first*, the dignity human beings have by virtue of being made in God' image; *second,* their dignity as beings who know and love God by conforming to his grace, but in an imperfect way as sojourners in life; *third,* is their dignity as beings now living in complete union with God, and this is the dignity of

[518] William E. May, "Making True Moral Judgments and Good Moral Choices," *Faith & Reason* 13, no. 3 (1987): 45-60, 60.
[519] William E. May, "Making True Moral Judgments and Good Moral Choices," *Journal Faith & Reason* 13, no. 3 (1987): 45–60, 59.
[520] William E. May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life, Second Edition* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 49.
[521] William E. May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life, Second Edition* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 57; Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. I-II, q. 94, a. 2.
[522] William E. May, "Making True Moral Judgments and Good Moral Choices," *Journal Faith & Reason* 13, no. 3 (1987): 45–60, 59.

the blessed."[523] The first kind of dignity exists in all men; the second, only in the just; the third only in the blessed. This vision integrates anthropology, theology, and ethics, framing Catholic moral norms as both rational and revelatory expressions of human worth and divine purpose. Within this tradition, freedom is not mere autonomy but the capacity to choose in harmony with truth, leading to authentic human flourishing.

4.6.5 The Moral Vision of Cardinal Carlo Caffarra

In an era of ethical uncertainty and cultural fragmentation, Cardinal Carlo Caffarra presented a firm vision of moral truth grounded in the dignity and unity of the human person. His moral theology begins with an anthropological foundation that affirms the inseparability of body and soul and the intrinsic worth of each individual. As he emphasized, "moral truth is not an abstract ideal but a concrete reality grounded in the good. He warned that relativism undermines the sanctity of marriage and distorts the understanding of human relationships."[524] Caffarra's critique of postmodern ethics rejected the reduction of practical reason to mere utility, which he believed erodes moral responsibility. He insisted that "freedom must be anchored in truth; otherwise, it becomes arbitrary and destructive."[525] His advocacy of objective moral order did not dismiss pastoral sensitivity but called for a conscience that can discern and embrace the good. In this regard, conscience is not a license for personal moral autonomy but, a witness to truth. He opposed views that sever conscience from objective norms, stressing that such interpretations compromise both its authority and nature.

This concern was powerfully articulated in his unpublished lecture, later cited by Livio Melina: "Either conscience proceeds from good and is the conscience of good, or good proceeds from conscience and is the good of conscience."[526] Caffarra held that this distinction was vital for preserving moral integrity and human dignity. Influenced by Blessed John Henry Newman,

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[523] William E. May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life, Second Edition* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 54 & 55; Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, 93, 4.
[524] Melina Livio, "Conscience and Truth in the Magisterium of Cardinal Caffarra," retrieved from https://voiceofthefamily.com/mgr-livio-melina-conscience-and-truth-in-the-magisterium-of-cardinal-caffarra/ (accessed 03/07/2025).
[525] Melina Livio, "Conscience and Truth in the Magisterium of Cardinal Caffarra," retrieved from retrieved from https://voiceofthefamily.com/mgr-livio-melina-conscience-and-truth-in-the-magisterium-of-cardinal-caffarra/ (accessed 03/07/2025).
[526] Carlo Caffarra, "The Church and the moral order," in *L'Osservatore Romano* (16 January 1976).

he affirmed that "conscience must be formed in dependence on truth, not personal."[527] Caffarra identified a fundamental rupture in moral thought: one view grounds truth in ontological reality, while the other elevates autonomous conscience as its own moral source. He cautioned, "When conscience is divorced from ontological reality, ethical chaos follows."[528] Drawing on classical metaphysics, he defended the primacy of truth over personal judgment, stating, "truth must precede personal judgment, not the other way around,"[529] asserting that authentic moral reasoning is anchored in objective reality.

He maintained that moral good is objective and divinely inscribed in the human person. Freedom, in his view, is not a tool for subjective meaning-making, but a calling to recognize and live by the truth embedded in creation. This aligns with Church teaching that links freedom intrinsically to truth. In The Education of Moral Conscience, he underscored: "conscience is a response to truth, not merely an internal sentiment."[530] He reiterated this in *The Restoration of Man*, critiquing modernity's attempt to redefine morality independent of nature and transcendence: "Everything that makes up what we call 'Western civilization' leads to atheism or to the expulsion of religion from the horizon of life."[531] Throughout his work, Caffarra defended the Church's responsibility to guide moral conscience in a culture dominated by relativism. He argued, "The Church does not impose arbitrary rules, but unveils and protects the moral truths that promote human flourishing. The Church's magisterium is tasked with speaking clearly in times of ethical ambiguity."[532] At the heart of his moral theology lies the conviction that human beings are destined for communion with God.

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[527] Melina Livio, "Conscience and Truth in the Magisterium of Cardinal Caffarra," retrieved from https://voiceofthefamily.com/mgr-livio-melina-conscience-and-truth-in-the-magisterium-of-cardinal-caffarra/ (accessed 03/07/2025).

[528] Carlo Caffarra, "The Autonomy of Conscience and Subjection to Truth," retrieved from ttps://www.caffarra.it/eng_autonomy1994.php (accessed 03/07/2025).

[529] Carlo Caffarra, "Living in Christ: fundamental principles of Catholic Moral Teaching: A Brief Exposition of Catholic Doctrine," retrieved from https://archive.org/details/livinginchristfu0000caff/page/n9/mode/2up (accessed 03/07/2025).

[530] Carlo Caffarra, "The Education of Moral Conscience According to Newman," *Lecture*, John Henry Newman Cultural Centre (August 18, 2017), retrieved from https://www.caffarra.it/eng180817.php (accessed 03/07/2025).

[531] Carlo Caffarra, "The Restoration of Man Cardinal Carlo Caffarra's Final Testimony," retrieved from https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/09/20/a-reconstruction-of-man-cardinal-carlo-caffarras-final-testimony/ (accessed 03/07/2025).

[532] Caffarra, Carlo. "Conscience, Truth and Magisterium in Conjugal Morality," retrieved from https://www.caffarra.it/eng_conscience.php (accessed 03/07/2025).

The discussion of contemporary critiques and defenses of moral relativism is vital in understanding the erosion of ethical clarity in today's pluralistic society. It exposes how subjective morality shaped by culture, media, and personal preference can dilute shared values and weaken moral responsibility. This framework is highly relevant to the study of youth in Kilifi County, where relativistic attitudes increasingly influence behaviour and decision-making. By engaging thinkers like Sacks, Chomsky, Finnis, Grisez, May, and Caffarra, the study identifies the need for a renewed moral foundation anchored in objective truth and human dignity. These insights offer practical and philosophical tools for restoring conscience formation, nurturing virtue, and reinforcing ethical norms among the youth. This is key in addressing moral fragmentation and strengthening communal integrity.

4.7 African Theological Perspectives on Moral Relativism

Moral relativism poses a growing challenge to African societies, prompting African theologians to respond with ethical frameworks rooted in tradition and faith. They argue that relativism conflicts with core African values such as communalism, Ubuntu, and reverence for life. This section highlights the contributions of John Mbiti, Bénézét Bujo, and Cardinal Robert Sarah, who defend objective morality through both theological insight and cultural heritage. Their perspectives offer meaningful responses to the moral confusion affecting youth and society across the continent.

4.7.1 John Mbiti: Moral Relativism within African Theological Thought

John Mbiti, a pioneering African theologian and philosopher, offers a contextual moral theology that integrates African traditional thought with theological ethics. In African Religions and Philosophy, he defines African philosophy as "a systematic study of the attitudes of mind and belief which have evolved in the many societies of Africa."[533] Mbiti affirms that "these beliefs are common to various parts of Africa, allowing him to use a wide range of examples from all over the continent"[534] that enabled him to draw broadly from diverse traditions. He insists that African cultures must be studied in their own contexts, revealing coherent moral systems grounded in community life. Central to Mbiti's vision is communalism, which underscores the relational nature of identity and morality. He writes, "When he rejoices, he

[533] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), Front Cover.
[534] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Front Cover.

rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and relatives whether dead or alive. The individual can only say, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[535] In this framework, morality arises not from individual autonomy but from mutual responsibility and shared existence.

Mbiti firmly rejects claims that African ethics are ambiguous or relativistic. He portrays them as consistent traditions that nurture social harmony and collective accountability. For Mbiti, religion is inseparable from daily life. It is not confined to formal rituals but serves as an active force guiding behavior and shaping moral consciousness across generations. He explains:

> Africans are notoriously religious. An individual is born religiously in a religious setting and grew up as a religious person able to distinguish between what is sacred and secular. So, religion permeated the entire department of human life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony: if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university, if he is a politician, he take it to the house of parliament.[536]

This vivid description affirms the holistic nature of African spirituality, showing its role in shaping ethical norms, interpersonal relationships, and societal obligations. Mbiti's imagery illustrates that moral decisions are rooted in ancestral wisdom and communal values. Religion, therefore, becomes a daily ethic that protects dignity and fosters unity. He critiques the limitations of Western Christianity in engaging with African realities. Mbiti observes:

> Even though attempts are made to give Christianity an African character, its Western form is in many ways foreign to African peoples. This foreignness is a drawback because it means that Christianity is kept on the surface and is not free to deepen its influence in all areas of African life and problems.[537]

This statement reflects the tension between imported religious forms and native spiritual depth. Mbiti views African life as integrated and holistic, where religion and culture function as one. Henri Mbaya and Cezula Ntozakhe affirm this unity: "Mbiti delves into the deep 'bone-marrow' of African life, and spirituality, the pulse and rhythm of African life."[538] His ethical outlook is shaped by communitarianism. Mbiti writes: "Each individual is a brother or a sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, a cousin or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or

[535] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 108-109.
[536] John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, I, 27, 2.
[537] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 27, 185.
[538] Henri Mbaya & Cezula Ntozakhe, "Contribution of John S. Mbiti to the Study of African Religions and African Theology and Philosophy," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 5, no. 3 (2019): 421–442, 425.

something else."[539] This relational perspective reinforces accountability and respect for life. Attacking another is not merely a personal offense, it violates the web of relationships that define society. Such interconnectedness creates moral security and generational trust. Based on these foundations, Mbiti offers a third path between moral absolutism and relativism. He advances a contextual moral theology rooted in African lived experience, which affirms ethical coherence while honoring cultural diversity.

In this understanding, Mbiti urges theologians to reconsider universal moral claims through the lens of African spirituality, social structures, and ancestral wisdom. Unlike Western models such as Kantian deontology which uphold categorical imperatives regardless of context, Mbiti promotes the principle of Ubuntu: "I am because we are." This principle promotes mutual respect, relational ethics, and accountability within the community. Drawing on proverbs, rituals, and tradition, Mbiti constructs a moral vision anchored in embodied experience and sacred connectedness. He does not fully endorse relativism or absolutism. Rather, he affirms a contextualist position, upholding consistent moral values that emerge from African traditions, spiritual depth, and communal relationships.

4.7.2 Bénézét Bujo: African Christian Ethics beyond Moral Relativism

Bénézét Bujo, a prominent Congolese theologian, contributes a culturally rooted critique of moral relativism within African Christian ethics. His theological approach builds upon an African worldview where morality is relational, historical, and spiritually interconnected. He expands John Mbiti's communitarian framework by advancing a moral theology centered on dignity, reciprocity, and the sanctity of life. Bujo insists that African ethics must be understood within their cultural contexts. As Wilson Muoha Maina notes, "Bujo's ethics is viewed in the natural moral law tradition and its implications for an African context."[540] He critiques Western ethical systems and argues for the development of an African ethic that respects and incorporates African cultural, moral religious frameworks. This perspective affirms that morality is culturally embedded and must be interpreted accordingly. Paulinus Odozor reinforces this view, stating:

[539] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1969), 104.
[540] Wilson Muoha Maina, "The Relevance of Autonomous Ethics in the Making of An African Christian Ethic: An Exploration of the Theology of Bénézet Bujo and "*Veritatis Splendor's*" Critique of Moral Autonomy," retrieved from https://research.library.fordham.edu/dissertations/AAI3169387/ (accessed 15/02/2025).

> When we engage in theological discussions or religious practices, we do so from the perspective of our own cultural backgrounds and experiences. We all speak from our various cultural caves as we open our mouths to theologize with God speaking to people in their various contexts of life.[541]

For Bujo, divine revelation is experienced through cultural lenses. The statement "God speaks to people in their various contexts" affirms that religious understanding is not monolithic but is shaped by the unique historical and cultural realities of each community. This challenges the imposition of external moral standards and calls for a theology that respects the diversity and complexity of African moral traditions. Bujo's theology highlights that divine revelation is culturally mediated and must be engaged through African lived experience. In *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage*, he critiques moral relativism for eroding ethical consistency and weakening community life. He writes, "human life is deserved in the well-known principle of African philosophy, I am a relative therefore I exist, or better expressed, therefore we exist."[542] This view affirms personhood as relational and communal. He adds, "Without communitarian relationship there is no identity for the African person. Only together with others can one become a human person and achieve individual freedom, which again should be exercised in a communitarian manner."[543] Bujo encourages ethical discernment, especially among youth, by linking personal freedom to communal accountability. He clarifies:

> The decision or behaviour of one member impacts on all. A good deed increases the welfare and growth of the community and a bad one hinders the life of all. Individual may not blindly follow the group. Life in community demands alertness and the maintenance of one's own individuality and therefore, discernment of the spirit must be preserved even in the context of friendship.[544]

This statement underscores the moral weight of individual choices and their impact on collective well-being. Bujo insists that African ethics foster both personal integrity and communal harmony. A good deed uplifts all, while a harmful action weakens collective life. Yet, Bujo also cautions against blind conformity, urging individuals to maintain moral discernment and personal integrity, even within close relationships. His emphasis on "discernment of the

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[541] Paulinus I. Odozor, "From Theology in Africa to African Theology (historical notes); Impact of the Council on New Generation African Theologians," in *Celebrating 50 Years of Vatican II: Challenges/Contributions of African Church* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 2012), 1-28, 11.
[542] Bénézét Bujo, *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2009), 21.
[543] Bénézét Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of the Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), 148.
[544] Bénézét Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa 2003), 118-119.

spirit" reflects the need for conscious ethical choices that honor both individuality and communal harmony. In essence, true personhood is achieved not in isolation but through responsible participation in the life of others. Bujo's theology calls for maturity, responsibility, and ethical reflection, reminding individuals that their choices affect the entire community. He explains:

> African morality focuses on maintaining harmony within the community and respecting the wisdom of ancestors and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Unlike Western ethics, which centers on the individual… African morality emphasizes that individuals and communities are interdependent - each is nothing without the other. This is not to say that there is no individual viewpoint, or that the subject does not exist in Africa, or that the community decides in the name of the subject, but rather, a stance that takes the individual as being nothing without the community, and the community as being nothing without the individual.[545]

Bujo warns that "individualism, modernization, economic disparities, poor leadership, and globalization"[546] threaten communal values and promote relativistic attitudes that disrupt cultural coherence. His theology rejects both the subjectivity of relativism and the rigidity of absolutism. Instead, Bujo's ethics emerge from African lived realities and relational structures. His contextualist approach prioritizes social harmony, shared responsibility, and the preservation of moral wisdom rooted in African tradition. Bujo's position is best understood as contextualist.

4.7.3 Cardinal Robert Sarah: Defending Moral Truth against Relativism

Cardinal Robert Sarah provides a rigorous theological critique of moral relativism, drawing from African spirituality and the universal teaching of the Catholic Church. His moral theology affirms fidelity to divine revelation, ecclesial unity, and resistance to doctrinal compromise. He warns against the rise of "fragmented truth" and the "dictatorship of relativism,"[547] which emerge when theology is reshaped by personal preference rather than divine authority. Authentic moral truth, according to Sarah, must remain anchored in Scripture, tradition, and the Church's magisterium. He cautions that "Western Christians seem to be

[545] Bénézet Bujo, "Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality," retrieved from https://muse.jhu.edu/article/41234/summary (accessed 06/01/2025).
[546] Bénézet Bujo, "Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality," retrieved fromhttps://www.google.co.ke/books/edition/Foundations_of_an_African_Ethic/WF7XAAAAMAAJ?hl=sw&gbpv=0&bsq=inauthor:%22B%C3%A9n%C3%A9zet%20Bujo%22 (accessed 06/01/2025).
[547] Robert Sarah, "Cardinal Sarah Urges Africa's Catholic Bishops to Defend "unity of faith" in October 2024 Synod on Synodality Session," retrieved from https://www.aciafrica.org/news/10721/cardinal-sarah-urges-africas-catholic-bishops-to-defend-unity-of-faith-in-october-2024-synod-on-synodality-session (accessed 08/07/2025).

seduced into a false sense of enlightenment and modernity,"[548] and calls the African Church to defend doctrine and priesthood with clarity and conviction. In his 2024 address to African bishops, he affirmed: "the Church in Africa will soon have to defend the truth of the priesthood and the unity of the faith. The Church in Africa is the voice of the poor, the simple and the small,"[549] urging bishops to oppose elevating "particular cultures" over universal Catholic teaching.

Sarah views moral relativism as a pastoral crisis. He writes: "Without a personal connection with God, there is neither constancy nor perspective. Spiritual drifting is also encouraged by the surrounding relativism… When I see young African Catholics going back to the traditional cults… I can tell that the priests have been unable to quench a great thirst."[550] This return to traditional sacrificial practices signals unmet spiritual needs and weakened doctrinal formation. He further states: "This decline is the sign of a crisis in faith and the result of the relativism that has very profoundly invaded the Church herself."[551] Sarah warns that relativism breeds confusion and undermines moral clarity. He observes: "The Church must remain vigilant… in our relativistic societies, good becomes what pleases the individual… Hence the Church's moral teaching is misunderstood or despised."[552] He urges African clergy to proclaim truth not from cultural preference, but from doctrinal fidelity: "The Church in Africa is charged with proclaiming the word of God in the face of Western Christians who… believe themselves to be evolved, modern and wise…"[553] He concludes: "Confusion about the right direction to take is the worst malady of our era. Babel… will not manage to meet the major challenge of

[548] Robert Sarah, "Cardinal Sarah: Church in Africa Must Defend Unity of Faith," retrieved from https://english.katholisch.de/artikel/53046-cardinal-sarah-church-in-africa-must-defend-unity-of-faith (accessed 05/07.2025).
[549] Robert Sarah, "Cardinal Sarah Urges Africa's Catholic Bishops to Defend "unity of faith" in October 2024 Synod on Synodality Session," retrieved from https://www.aciafrica.org/news/10721/cardinal-sarah-urges-africas-catholic-bishops-to-defend-unity-of-faith-in-october-2024-synod-on-synodality-session (accessed 08/07/2025).
[550] Robert Sarah, *God or Nothing: A Conversation on Faith with Nicolas Diat* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 120.
[551] Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing: A Conversation on Faith with Nicolas Diat*, 133.
[552] Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing: A Conversation on Faith with Nicolas Diat*, 157.
[553] Robert Cardinal Sarah, "Cardinal Sarah Urges Africa's Catholic Bishops to Defend 'Unity of Faith' in October 2024 Synod on Synodality Session," retrieved from https://www.aciafrica.org/10721/cardinal-sarah-urges-africas-catholic-bishops-to-defend-unity-of-faith-in-october-2024-synod-on-synodality-session (accessed 05/07/2025).

contemporary relativism."[554] Sarah warns that the Church risks losing its identity and spiritual authority if it descends into confusion and doctrinal fragmentation.

By comparing it to the Tower of Babel, he underscores the danger of doctrinal disunity and cultural compromise. His concern is that contemporary society, clouded by subjective values and shifting cultural norms, challenges the Church's role as a beacon of truth. Together, John Mbiti, Bénézét Bujo, and Cardinal Robert Sarah affirm that moral relativism threatens ethical formation and spiritual identity. Mbiti advocates for communal moral coherence grounded in Ubuntu and ancestral wisdom. Bujo expands this with a relational theology that links freedom to communal accountability and warns against moral fragmentation. Sarah reinforces their insights with ecclesial urgency, emphasizing the need for doctrinal clarity, prayerful fidelity, and resistance to relativistic ideologies. Their shared vision challenges the youth of Kilifi to root their moral lives in African tradition, communal responsibility, and revealed truth.

Conclusion

Moral relativism presents a critical challenge to the ethical and spiritual formation of youth in Kilifi Deanery. Cultural shifts and external influences often obscure foundational moral values. This chapter has demonstrated that restoring moral clarity among the youth requires a firm return to objective ethical principles. These principles are rooted in African communal ethics and Catholic moral teaching. The theological and philosophical perspectives explored affirm that without grounding in truth and tradition, moral reasoning becomes fragmented and inconsistent. In response to this concern, the subsequent chapter will explore the moral relevance of the principle of the Golden Rule. This timeless ethical standard will be proposed as a constructive way forward in curbing relativism among the youth.

[554] Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing: A Conversation on Faith with Nicolas Diat* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 115.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MORAL RELEVANCE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF THE GOLDEN RULE IN CURBING RELATIVISM AMONG THE YOUTH IN KILIFI DEANERY

Introduction

This chapter critically examines the relevance of the Golden Rule in addressing the challenge of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery. It offers a structured exploration of its conceptual, historical, and practical dimensions. First, the chapter discusses the concept of moral relativism and its philosophical foundations, examining how it influences the ethical perceptions and choices of youth in Kilifi Deanery. Second, it presents the Golden Rule as a universal moral principle that counters relativistic tendencies, drawing on its historical significance and the ethical insights of figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Third, it explores the practical application of this principle within the local context, emphasizing the role of families, the Church, and county institutions in nurturing ethical consistency. Finally, the chapter proposes theological and pastoral recommendations aimed at reinforcing moral absolutism and promoting a coherent moral vision among the youth.

5.1 The Concept of the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Mat 7:12), emerges as a universal ethical principle with profound moral significance. John E. Horsfield defines Golden Rule as "the principle of treating others as one would wish to be treated. It is a maxim of altruism seen in many human religions and human cultures."[555] As a framework rooted in mutual respect and reciprocity, it transcends cultural, religious, and philosophical boundaries, offering a foundation for ethical conduct and moral clarity. Beyond its philosophical and religious dimensions, the Golden Rule underscores the importance of empathy as a foundation for ethical decision-making. Bill Puka highlights this aspect by asserting that "…In any relevant context, the golden rule urges us to think before we act, then imagine how we would felt if the same is done to us."[556] Puka's reflection on the Golden Rule highlights its importance in

[555] John E. Horsfield, "The Golden Rule," retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/63576138/The_Golden_Rule (accessed 05/04/2025).
[556] Bill Puka, "The Golden Rule," retrieved from https://iep.utm.edu/goldrule/#H5 (accessed 29.03/2025).

prompting youth to evaluate the emotional impact of their actions on others, especially if those actions were reversed.

The principle of the Golden Rule fundamentally emphasizes the cultivation of empathy by encouraging individuals to imagine themselves in the position of others. Its universal relevance lies in its ability to guide meaningful interpersonal relationships by posing the reflective question, "How would I feel if someone treated me this way?" This principle facilitates a transformative shift from a self-centered perspective to an inclusive and empathetic outlook. It offers significant potential to mitigate the isolating effects of relativism among youth by fostering mutual respect and highlighting the far-reaching consequences of individual actions. Framed as an invitation to shared humanity rather than an imposed directive, the Golden Rule promotes emotional and relational stability amidst ethical ambiguity.

In the moral landscape of Kilifi Deanery, the significance of the Golden Rule is deepened by its alignment with the Archdiocese of Mombasa's pastoral motto, "That all may be one" (John 17:21). This guiding vision underscores the importance of unity, collective moral values, and shared ethical accountability within ecclesial and communal contexts. When considered together, the principle of the Golden Rule and the Archdiocesan motto form a cohesive ethical framework capable of confronting the challenge of moral relativism. The Motto harmonizes personal integrity with communal coherence, and advances the Church's commitment to moral formation. Tracing the Golden Rule's historical development reveals its deep philosophical roots and affirms its role as a universal moral standard across cultures and eras.

5.2 Historical Development of the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule is a universally acknowledged ethical principle, deeply embedded in a wide range of cultures and traditions. Within Christianity, it is clearly expressed in the teachings of Jesus Christ: "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12), establishing a moral imperative grounded in reciprocal dignity and compassion. This enduring standard extends beyond Christian theology and has been embraced across diverse cultures and traditions as a foundational guide for ethical conduct and social harmony. Ancient thinkers such as Confucius articulated this principle as: "Do not do to others what you do not want done to

yourself,"[557] underscoring the avoidance of harm as a key moral ideal. These expressions reflect a shared commitment to reciprocity and illustrate how human behavior, when guided by mutual respect, contributes to the stability and cohesion of society. The universality of the Golden Rule is further evidenced by Zahra Rakhshani's comparative study:

> In Buddhism, Dhammapada emphasizes that He who seeks his own happiness by oppressing others, who also desire to have happiness, will not find happiness in his next existence. Confucianism teaches reciprocity: "Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you" (Analects: 15.24). Hinduism emphasizes treating all creatures as oneself to attain happiness. In Judaism, Exodus instructs not to wrong or oppress a stranger, reminding that the people were once strangers in Egypt (Exodus 22: 21). Christianity's Golden Rule is found in the Gospel of Matthew: "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mat 7: 12). Islam also refers to the Golden Rule, with verses in Surah Al-Mutaffifin warning against cheating others (Mutaffifin: 1-3).[558]

Zahra's exploration of the foundational principles of the Golden Rule has profoundly influenced ethical and religious teachings, emphasizing the universal themes of reciprocity and moral accountability across cultures and historical contexts. This universal relevance across diverse religious traditions establishes a healthy foundation for examining its application in moral leadership. As detailed below, influential figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. embodied the Golden Rule through their commitment to justice and human dignity, illustrating its transformative potential in addressing complex ethical and societal issues.

5.2.1 Mahatma Gandhi and the Philosophy of the Golden Rule

Grounded in the principle of Ahimsa (nonviolence) and the teachings of Hinduism, Mahatma Gandhi's understanding of the Golden Rule provides a profound ethical framework emphasizing the treatment of all beings with respect and dignity. As Kartick Chandra Barman notes, "Mahatma Gandhi was a moralist through and through. He measured every man and everything in terms of morality, purity, righteousness. Truth was the touches of any action for him. The criterion of any action, political, personal or social should be, according to Gandhi, moral reasonableness of the act advocating that the means must be as pure as the ends."[559] This

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[557] NeuroLaunch.com Company, "Golden Rule of Behaviour: Transforming Relationships and Society," retrieved from https://neurolaunch.com/golden-rule-of-behavior/ (accessed 13/03/2025). "NeuroLaunch.com is a company dedicated to providing accessible and comprehensive information on psychology and brain science."
[558] The Dhammapada: *The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), 131.
[559] Kartick Chandra Barman, "Mahatma Gandhi's Morality: Ends and Means," *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research,* 9 (2016): 1–8, 1.

insistence on moral integrity aligns with challenges faced by youth in Kilifi, who often encounter societal pressures that promote competition at the expense of ethical values. Gandhi's emphasis on truth, honesty, and fairness presents a corrective to moral compromise, reminding young people that authentic success depends on both ethical means and ends. His philosophy, therefore, serves as a timeless guide for transformative personal and social progress.

In a contemporary world often marked by pragmatism and moral shortcuts, Gandhi's insistence on moral integrity throughout the process offers a critical ethical anchor. His concept of Satyagraha, defined in his autobiography as "Holding onto truth,"[560] forms the bedrock of his social philosophy, advancing ethical conduct grounded in mutual respect. Gandhi's interpretation of the Golden Rule also encompassed a deep commitment to inclusivity and love as spiritual obligations. For Gandhi, the Golden Rule embodied unconditional love and universal connection, "rooted in the Hindu philosophy that all individuals, including adversaries, are part of an ultimate reality."[561] This understanding informed his advocacy for marginalized groups, most notably his efforts to confront entrenched social discrimination in India. As John Moniz highlights, "Gandhi confronted deep-seated discrimination by renaming India's untouchables 'Harijans,' meaning 'people of God,' advocating their acceptance as equals."[562] This act reflected his conviction that dignity and justice must extend to all members of society.

Gandhi's legacy of ethical inclusion holds particular significance for youth in Kilifi County, where regional and cultural differences often give rise to discrimination and insecurity. His efforts to restore dignity to the marginalized offer a compelling lesson in tolerance, equality, and social transformation. By recognizing shared humanity and promoting unity across social divides, Gandhi's spiritual and ethical vision calls youth to embrace compassion, fairness, and moral responsibility. His belief that true devotion lies in addressing suffering and fostering communal harmony provides an enduring framework for building an inclusive and ethically grounded society.

[560] Mahatma Gandhi, *An Autobiography* (Aheniedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2002), 30.
[561] Mahatma Gadhi, *An Autobiography*, 30.
[562] John Moniz, *Mother and the Mahatma* (Bandra Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 1997), 87.

5.2.2 Martin Luther King Junior: The Golden Rule and Nonviolence

Martin Luther King Jr., a pivotal figure in the American civil rights movement, exemplified the Golden Rule through his unwavering advocacy for justice, equality, and nonviolent resistance. His renowned "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered during the 1963 March on Washington, powerfully conveyed his ethical vision: a world where individuals are judged "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."[563] Although King did not explicitly cite Matthew 7:12 *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,"* his message consistently reflected the spirit of reciprocal dignity and moral accountability embedded in the Golden Rule. King's philosophy emphasized disciplined protest and moral responsibility. He urged:

> We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back... In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence.[564]

This emphasis on ethical conduct resonates with Kenya's Generation Z, particularly during the 2024 protests. These youth rallied against the Finance Bill 2024, political exclusion, economic injustice, corruption,[565] and abductions, mobilizing collective action through nonpartisan, non-ethnic online platforms. Their peaceful resistance and moral resolve parallel King's own vision. As observed by Gabrielle Lynch "the protests were unusual for not being associated with a particular politician, party, or ethnic groups. Instead, the protests had been organized largely online by a self-declared non-ethnic youth or "Gen Z" mobilisers."[566] Their digital strategies enhanced civic engagement and emphasized transparent governance. King's philosophy continued to inspire youth movements globally. In his sermon "I Have Been to the Mountaintop" delivered on the eve of his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. reflected on his mission with remarkable equanimity and conviction. He stated:

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[563] Martin Luther King, "A Summary and Analysis of Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' Speech," retrieved from https://interestingliterature.com/2022/10/martin-luther-king-i-have-a-dream-speech-summary-analysis/ (accessed 13/03/2025).

[564] Martin Luther King, "A Summary and Analysis of Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' Speech," retrieved from https://interestingliterature.com/2022/10/martin-luther-king-i-have-a-dream-speech-summary-analysis/ (accessed 13/03/2025).

[565] Filiberto Ceriani, & Laura Makokha (eds.), "Timeline of Kenya's 2024 Youth Protests," retrieved from thecontrapuntal.com/timeline-of-kenyas-2024-youth-protests/ (accessed 19/04/2025).

[566] Gabrielle Lynch, "Kenya has changed: The Gen-Z Protests and what they Mean," retrieved from https://democracyinafrica.org/kenya-has-changed-the-gen-z-protests-and-what-they-mean/ (accessed 14/03/2025).

> I am happy, tonight. I am not worried about anything. I am not fearing any man. We are not engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God's children. And that we do not have to live like we are forced to live. When people get caught up with that which is right and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory.[567]

This message resonates with youth committed to justice despite adversity. The insistence on perseverance and ethical conduct underscores King's vision of transformative social change rooted in love and mutual respect. In another sermon, he declared:

> We have got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point. We have got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together. I do not know what will happen now. We have got some difficult days ahead. But it does not matter with me now. Because I have been to the mountaintop. And I do not mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I am not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will.[568]

King's enduring appeal lies in his moral clarity. In Strength to Love, he wrote: ""Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that,"[569] affirming his belief in love as a redemptive force. George Cassidy Payne expands on King's universal message: "King's vision was revolutionary... not just about dismantling racial discrimination and segregation... but a movement for freedom, dignity and justice for all marginalized people, regardless of race, gender or nationality."[570] This interpretation highlights King's relevance to contemporary global issues, including gender inequality, refugee rights, economic disparity, and climate justice. His assertion that "Progress begins with a dream but is sustained by a deep commitment to driving meaningful change… Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,"[571] affirms justice as a universal moral obligation.

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[567] Sermon of Martin Luther King Jr. delivered on the night of April 3, 1968, at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, Titled *"I Have Been to the Mountaintop."* See also, Cable News Network (CNN), "Here is the speech Martin Luther King Jr. gave the night before he died," retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/04/us/martin-luther-king-jr-mountaintop-speech-trnd/index.html (accessed 14/03/2025).

[568] "Sermon of Martin Luther King Junior, delivered on the night of April 3, 1968."

[569] Martin Luther King Junior, "Strength to Love", retrieved from https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/strength-love (accessed 14/03/2025).

[570] George Cassidy Payne, "Beyond the Dream: Continuing Dr. King's Vision for Global Justice and Compassion", retrieved from https://www.themindfulword.org/beyond-dream-restorative-justice/ (accessed 03/14/2025).

[571] Martin Luther King Junior, "Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have a Dream", retrieved from https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm (accessed 14/03/2025).

In Kilifi County, youth face challenges including civil rights violations and exploitative labor conditions in EPZ factories. King's ethical framework offers a compelling lens through which such struggles may be addressed. The discussion now transitions to how the Catholic Church in Kilifi Deanery engages the Golden Rule in its pastoral mission to counter moral relativism among youth.

5.3 Applying the Golden Rule to Counter Youth Relativism

The Catholic Church in Kilifi Deanery strategically applies the Golden Rule to counter moral relativism among youth by fostering ethical formation rooted in unity, respect, and human dignity. Guided by the Archdiocese's motto, "That all may be one" (John 17:21), and supported by inclusive collaboration with families, local institutions, and youth groups, the Church promotes shared values in a multicultural setting. As Peter Kazungu notes, "Kilifi County's cultural diversity necessitates inclusive and coordinated responses to ethical pluralism."[572] Pastoral data and field engagement affirm the Golden Rule's effectiveness in cultivating moral resilience. Pope Francis reinforces this vision, stating, "Young people are the future of our world. They are its present; even now, they are helping to enrich it. Young people are no longer children. They are at a time of life when they begin to assume a number of responsibilities, sharing alongside adults in the growth of the family, society and the Church."[573] Through this integrated approach, the Church affirms its enduring mission to shape ethically grounded youth within culturally responsive pastoral care.

5.3.1 The Stakeholders

The challenges posed by moral relativism, particularly among the youth, necessitate a deliberate and multifaceted response characterized by collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Anchored in the Golden Rule and aligned with the Church's pastoral mission, this initiative draws upon the spiritual leadership provided by the Church, the foundational ethical values instilled within families, policy interventions implemented by the County Government, and the active involvement of the youth themselves. Collectively, these stakeholders establish a holistic framework that integrates spiritual, social, and communal dimensions, fostering a generation

[572] Peter Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 27/02/2024.
[573] Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (March 25, 2019), no. 64.

firmly rooted in moral integrity and ethical consistency. An examination of the contributions of these stakeholders underscores their interconnected roles and the critical importance of synergistic collaboration in solidifying the Golden Rule as a fundamental principle for ethical development within Kilifi Deanery.

5.3.1.1 The Role of the Church as a Moral Anchor

The Church occupies a central position as a key stakeholder in addressing moral relativism among the youth. This analysis draws upon insights from John Paul II's conceptualization of "the Church as family" which the Synod Fathers "acknowledged … as an expression of the Church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa for this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust."[574] These qualities closely resonate with the cultural traditions of the Midzi-Chenda community embedded within Kilifi Deanery such as collective responsibility, mutual respect, and communal unity. These are integral values not only to the ethos of the Midzi-Chenda but also to the Church's mission to confront moral relativism. By incorporating these values, the Church aims to cultivate a nurturing and inclusive community, thereby emerging as a unifying force capable of addressing the fragmented moral perspectives inherent in relativism. This approach is intricately connected to the broader mandate of evangelization, as articulated by Pope Francis:

> In our day, a command to "go and make disciples" echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization … all of us are called to take part in this new missionary "going forth." Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel. The drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present.[575]

This renewed missionary vision highlights the Church's steadfast dedication to fostering collaboration with diverse stakeholders, advancing ethical coherence, and addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by moral relativism within Kilifi Deanery. At its core, the collaborative framework represents a transformative approach to countering moral relativism, fostering spiritual development, communal harmony, and the formation of a generation deeply

[574] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, On the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission Toward the Year 2000 (September 14, 1995): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 85 (1996), 5-82, no. 63.
[575] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, On the Joy of the Gospel (November 24, 2013): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 105 (2013), 1019-1137, nos. 20 & 21.

committed to moral integrity and ethical accountability. Through initiatives such as youth catechesis, mentorship programs, Small Christian Communities (SCCs), and interfaith dialogues, the Church establishes avenues for young individuals to engage in self-reflection, meaningful dialogue, and principled decision-making. Furthermore, these programs address the complex multicultural dynamics of the community, equipping youth with the tools to navigate cultural diversity with empathy, moral clarity, and an enduring commitment to universal values.

5.3.1.2 Catechetical and Mentorship Programs for Youth

The rising challenge of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery demands urgent and transformative measures. Youth catechesis and mentorship programs have become essential in countering this trend by instilling universal ethical principles inspired by the Golden Rule. These programs deepen the youth's understanding of God while cultivating moral integrity and fostering values such as love, fairness, and respect. These virtues provide a solid ethical foundation, guiding young individuals in navigating the complexities of an ever-changing, multicultural society.

The Congregation for the Clergy in the *General Directory for Catechesis* define catechesis as "the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways."[576] This definition underscores the need for catechesis to be both spiritually enriching and responsive to the multifaceted realities of modern life, including its social, cultural, and technological dimensions. For catechesis to remain relevant, it must engage with these evolving contexts while firmly anchoring itself in the faith tradition. As a lifelong process, it encompasses initial conversion, faith formation, education, and ongoing spiritual growth. Its ultimate aim is to foster a deeper relationship with God, revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. In Kilifi, the Church plays a pivotal role in guiding youth by imparting foundational principles of faith and universal moral values that counteract the subjective nature of moral relativism.

[576] Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (August 15, 1997): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 89 (1997): 861–1042, no. 105.

Through catechetical programs, the Church nurtures virtues such as integrity, compassion, and accountability, empowering young people to make thoughtful, value-driven decisions aligned with their faith and beneficial to their communities. This response to moral relativism emphasizes faith-based ethical principles, providing a clear and consistent moral framework. The *General Directory for Catechesis* highlights the importance of addressing the diverse religious experiences of young people. It acknowledges:

> There are those who have not been baptized, others who have not completed their Christian initiation, some who face profound crises of faith, and others who are in the process of making a decision regarding their faith. There are also those who have already made a commitment and require guidance and support. The most effective catechesis is provided within the broader framework of pastoral care, particularly when it directly addresses the challenges affecting young people's lives. To ensure its success, catechesis should incorporate methods such as situational analysis, the integration of insights from human sciences and education, and active collaboration with both the laity and young people themselves...[577]

The General Directory for Catechesis provides a strong foundation for addressing moral relativism among youth in Kilifi, emphasizing catechetical methods rooted in the Golden Rule. The Catholic Church in Kilifi Deanery translates these principles into impactful initiatives, particularly through annual youth conferences and retreats. A pastoral agent notes, "These events unite young people from various parishes across Kilifi Deanery for workshops, seminars, and group discussions focused on critical ethical and spiritual themes. They are guided to explore the application of the Golden Rule in their daily interactions, examine the role of faith in moral decision-making."[578] By linking Christian teaching to everyday challenges, these programs foster empathy, respect, and spiritual discernment, equipping youth with a faith-based framework to navigate ethical dilemmas and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

5.3.1.3 Small Christian Communities as Pillars of Pastoral Renewal

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kilifi Deanery serve as practical embodiments of the Golden Rule, fostering unity in diversity to address moral relativism among the youth. By creating inclusive spaces that transcend socio-cultural divisions, SCCs promote dignity and respect through activities such as seminars, group discussions, and spiritual mentorship. These efforts equip young people with universal ethical principles rooted in Christian teachings,

[577] Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (August 15, 1997): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 89 (1997): 861–1042, no. 184.
[578] Anonymous interviewee, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 28/02/2024.

enabling them to resist relativistic ideologies and peer pressure. Anchored in values of interdependence, harmony, and solidarity, SCCs nurture communal responsibility and moral clarity, empowering youth to become agents of integrity and positive societal change. As Orobator Agbonkhianmeghe highlighted, "The ecclesiological expression of SCCs corresponds to uniquely African values of interdependence, harmony, cooperation and hospitality that are constitutive elements of the human community commonly rendered as Ubuntu philosophy… grounded in the fundamental understanding of person-in-community as wholeness, relationality."[579] SCCs are venues of unity among Christians.

In Kilifi Deanery, the Church effectively leverages Small Christian Communities (SCCs) to address a range of socio-cultural challenges, focusing on peace-building and fostering ethical consistency among the youth, while strengthening their moral foundations. Jane Wanje emphasize that active participation in mentorship activities facilitated within SCCs such as seminars and workshops has been instrumental in resolving youth-related challenges within parishes."[580] These platforms enable mentors to effectively guide the youth in addressing intricate ethical challenges, while modeling the application of the Golden Rule in their interactions and decision-making practices. Despite these commendable efforts to promote harmonious coexistence among the youth, persistent issues such as insecurity and discrimination especially against people from other regions, commonly referred to as "Wabara," remain significant concerns in Kilifi County and neighboring regions. The coastal areas, in particular, have been marked by recurrent ethnic and political violence, further exacerbating tensions between communities.

Airo, Kapinde, Chidongo, and Muoki highlight: "There seems to be a pattern of recurrent violence and protests especially in all the periodic elections since the re-introduction of multi-party politics in the early 1990s. For example, the violence between Midzi-Cheda people especially the youth and the migrant from up-country communities (Wabara) remain unresolved.

[579]Orobator Agbonkhianmeghe, "Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Becoming Church: Practice, Progress and Prospects," in *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-looking Church*, ed. Klaus Krämer (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2013), 113-125.

[580] Jane Wanje a moderator in SCC highlighted how active participation of young people in SCCs have been impactful to the Church especially in liturgical celebrations and acts of mercy. She gave an example of youth initiatives of visiting the elderly, supporting disadvantaged families, and aiding marginalized groups, as one way SCCs have instilled the values of compassion and empathy in young people through the seminars and workshops facilitated. These acts of mercy exemplify the Golden Rule and encourage ethical behaviour rooted in community care countering relativistic lifestyles among the youth in the deanery.

Despite the challenges above, the Roman Catholic Church has been committed to ‘‘critical peace-related values…[581] The Church in Kilifi Deanery faces ongoing challenges such as political violence, insecurity, and gender inequality, some involving Small Christian Community (SCC) members. Despite these issues, SCCs offer a relational model that fosters unity and ethical formation among youth. Through seminars, mentorship, and the Golden Rule, they promote dialogue, moral integrity, and spiritual growth. Field study findings affirm SCCs as vital platforms for combating moral relativism and strengthening communal bonds in culturally diverse settings.

Table 1: Strategies applied by SCCs in Curbing Moral Relativism among Youth in SCCs within Kilifi Deanery.

Strategy	**Rating**	**Percentage**
Leadership modeling	Strong	80%
Interactive Workshops	Very strong	100%
Service-oriented initiatives	Strong	80%
Faith-based teaching	Very strong	100%
Peer mentorship programs	Neutral	60%

The study findings reveal that interactive workshops and faith-based teachings were rated as highly effective in addressing moral relativism among youth in SCCs within Kilifi Deanery, showcasing their significant role in fostering ethical values and community bonds. Leadership modeling, service-oriented initiatives, and reflective practices demonstrated strong impact, contributing notably to moral and spiritual development. However, storytelling and peer mentorship programs showed moderate effectiveness, suggesting potential areas for improvement to enhance their influence. Overall, the strategies collectively play a vital role in equipping youth to navigate ethical challenges while promoting unity and moral resilience.

[581] Richard Ooko Airo, Stephen Asol Kapinde, Tsawe Munga wa Chidongo & Stephen Muoki Joshua, “Horizons and Bridges of Dialogue: Interreligious Dialogue and Social Cohesion in the Coastal Kenya,” *Journal of Jesuit Education and Open-Schooling for Holistic Societal Studies* 77, no. 1 (2024): 1-14, 2.

5.3.1.3 .1 Promoting Interfaith and Multicultural Unity

In the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Mombasa, particularly in Kilifi Deanery, fostering interfaith harmony and multicultural unity holds considerable significance, especially in the context of the region's diverse cultural and religious landscape. Kilifi County, renowned for its rich tapestry of communities, provides an ideal setting for promoting interreligious dialogue and embracing diversity. Grounded in the transformative spirit of Vatican Council II and its landmark declaration *Nostra Aetate* stated: "In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love … among nations… what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship."[582] In the spirit of Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church in Kilifi Deanery has championed impactful initiatives to strengthen interfaith dialogue and unity, particularly among the youth. This commitment is aimed at building bridges with non-Christian communities in order to celebrate cultural diversity within the County.

Grounded in these principles, the Archdiocese has prioritized youth-focused initiatives designed to counter moral relativism and foster interfaith understanding. These efforts are guided by the Golden Rule, which serves as a universal ethical principle that unites youth across cultural and religious differences. By instilling values of dignity and respect, these programs empower young people to embrace inclusivity and engage in interfaith collaboration rooted in shared principles. A pastoral agent, who preferred to remain anonymous, underscored the pivotal role of Willybard Lagho, the Bishop of Malindi Diocese, in championing interreligious dialogue within Coastal Kenya. He commented that "His leadership, informed by a deep understanding of the complexity of regional dynamics and his position within the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, has facilitated meaningful exchanges among individuals of diverse faith traditions."[583] Interfaith forums established by the Archdiocese provide structured spaces for the youth to participate in dialogues that promote mutual understanding and ethical cohesion.

[582] Vatican Council II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965): 961–965, no. 1.
[583] Pastoral agent, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 29/02/20224. The interviewee requested anonymity.

Key initiatives within these forums include collaborative community service projects, such as environmental conservation and public space beautification, which unite youth from various religious backgrounds. These activities exemplify the practical application of interfaith collaboration, fostering mutual respect, ethical responsibility, and strengthened communal bonds. By centering discussions on values like empathy, equity, and respect, these forums effectively counter moral relativism and reinforce universal ethical standards, aligning with the Archdiocese's motto, *"That all may be one."* Despite challenges such as insecurity and lingering historical tensions within Coastal regions, the Archdiocese continues to transform theoretical principles into practical interfaith engagements that promote harmony and ethical awareness. Scholars such as Richard Ooko Airo, Stephen Asol Kapinde, and Stephen Muoki Joshua underscore the Church's proactive role in advancing peace-building initiatives. They highlight that "the Archdiocese has initiated educational programmes aimed at creating awareness of the value of interreligious dialogue in a multicultural and multi-religious setting..."[584]

Interfaith dialogue plays a crucial role in preserving the region's cultural and religious diversity. However, as John Kazungu notes: "resistance stemming from historical mistrust and misconceptions about interfaith efforts, such as the fear that participation requires abandoning one's own faith or identity. These challenges emphasize the complexity of creating safe spaces for genuine understanding and peaceful coexistence."[585] Similarly, Martin Kivuva Musonde further observe that, "dialogue is significant in building bridges between Muslims and Christians. By fostering dialogue, we can dismantle stereotypes, create a more inclusive society, and work together to address the pressing issue of our time."[586] Within Kilifi Deanery, the principle of the Golden Rule, centered on treating others with dignity and respect, emerges as a powerful tool against moral relativism. Integrated into youth catechesis, mentorship seminars, Small Christian Communities, and interfaith forums, this principle nurtures mutual understanding, ethical consistency, and communal responsibility. By bridging cultural and ideological divides, these

[584] Richard Ooko Airo, Stephen Asol Kapinde & Stephen Muoki Joshua, "Horizons and Bridges of Dialogue: Interreligious Dialogue and Social Cohesion in the Coastal Kenya," *Journal of Jesuit Education and Open-Schooling for Holistic Societal Studies* 77, no. 1 (2024): 1-14, 4.
[585] John Kazungu, interviewed by the researcher, at Maweni villege, Kikambala, 29/02/2024.
[586] Message of Bishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of the Archdiocese of Mombasa emphasizing respectful dialogue as the way to go, at a consultative workshop on 'Christianity in dialogue with Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR)', at *Donum Dei* in Nairobi, 9-10th April 2024. See also AMECEA Social Communications, "Kenya: Building Bridges Between Christians, Muslims And African Traditional Religion Calls for Respectful Dialogue," retrieved from https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2024/04/12/kenya-building-bridges-between-christians-muslims-and-african-traditional-religion-calls-for-respectful-dialogue/ (accessed 07/04/2025).

initiatives equip young people to contribute to a more cohesive and harmonious society. Moreover, the family serves as a crucial partner in this initiative.

5.3.1.4 The Family as Stakeholder

Being the cornerstone of formation, the family serves as a fundamental space for nurturing values that shape humanity and ultimately, the wider society. As the initial and most influential institution in a child's life, the family creates a nurturing environment where principles like respect, dignity, and shared responsibility are deeply rooted; principles that resonate with the Golden Rule. Vatican Council II describes the family as "a school for a richer humanity,"[587] underscoring its critical contribution to shaping moral, social, and spiritual values essential for character formation. Collaborating closely with the Church, families are uniquely positioned to counteract the detrimental effects of moral relativism, which threatens to undermine universal ethical standards.

Adolescence, a critical phase of questioning and self-discovery, further underscores the family's duty to provide steadfast guidance in reinforcing ethical integrity. Cardinal Christian Tumi eloquently identifies this sphere as "a primary place of humanization for the person and society, and the cradle of life and love."[588] These virtues serve as essential tools for navigating societal complexities and countering subjective moral frameworks. Through consistent engagement, intentional teaching, and the model behaviour demonstrated by families as caregivers, individuals develop an enduring respect for others and an understanding of ethical coherence. This formative space transcends its primary role as a unit of personal development, emerging as a powerful force for societal progress. In African contexts, the family environment provides a repository for communitarian values such as respect for elders, familial unity, and the sanctity of life. As Ikenna U. Okafor notes: "Virtues like love, gentleness, and kindness, as well as vices like selfishness and violence, find their origins in the family, which serves as the foundation for building faith and morality. Every word and deed of a parent are like a Gospel

[587] Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966), 1025-1115, no. 52.
[588] Christian Tumi, "The Compendium, The Family and the Situation in Africa," in *Towards A New Evangelization of African Society: Proceedings of the Continental Conference on the Presentation in Africa of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (ed.), Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 27-30 August 2008), 139-151, 139.

read directly by the children, and like a fabric woven into the character of the child."[589] It plays a central role in human formation and in driving the progress of human civilization.

To evaluate the role of families as key stakeholders in advancing the Golden Rule and addressing moral relativism among youth, a case study was conducted in three Small Christian Communities in Kilifi Deanery. The study aimed to evaluate how families actively foster this universal ethical principle to curb relativism within their setting. A total of 55 families, all actively engaged in their respective SCCs, participated in the research, employing a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative insights were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions with youth, and researcher's observations of SCCs activities, while quantitative data were collected using structured Likert scale questionnaires. The findings, systematically presented in an accompanying table, offer an in-depth analysis of the role of this institution in fostering the Golden Rule and its broader impact on moral formation in counteracting relativism.

Table 2: The Role of the Family as Stakeholder in Advancing the Golden Rule to Curb Relativism

Statement	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Not Sure**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**
Families actively promote human dignity	30 (55%)	2 (36%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Families exemplify ethical coherence in daily life	28 (51%)	22 (40%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Families collaborate with SCCs to combat moral relativism	25 (45%)	23 (42%)	4 (7%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
Families provide ethical guidance to adolescents	27 (49%)	24 (44%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Families effectively transmit values aligned with the Golden Rule	29 (53%)	21 (28%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)

The table underscores the vital role of families as primary agents in promoting the Golden Rule and addressing moral relativism within their households and communities. A significant majority affirmed their commitment to fostering ethical values such as respect,

[589] Ikenna U. Okafor, "Towards A Listening and Accompanying Church," in *Journeying Together in Hope: A Theological and Pastoral Reflection for a Synodal Church in Africa* (eds.), Stan Chu Ilo & Leonida Katunge (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2024), 147-260, 249.

dignity, and responsibility while providing moral guidance to their children. Minimal uncertainty or dissent further reinforces the families' central role in cultivating stable moral development and upholding universal ethical principles independently of external institutions. However, insights from one-on-one discussions revealed that many families encountered parenting challenges stemming from peer pressure, cultural diversity, and economic constraints, particularly within women-led or fragmented households. Despite these difficulties, they exhibited resilience and adaptability, leveraging Church-supported initiatives such as Caritas Banks under the Archdiocese to manage their responsibilities effectively and ensure their children's well-being.

The study further examined the Catholic Women Association's (CWA) role in applying the Golden Rule to counter moral relativism among youth, emphasizing its significance in fostering ethical development. Conducted through a seminar with 70 participants, the research identified an initially limited understanding of the principle, which was significantly enhanced through structured discussions. The findings highlight the CWA's effectiveness in embedding the Golden Rule into everyday life, reinforcing ethical consistency, communal responsibility, and moral integrity as indicated in the table below.

Table 3: CWA Members' Evaluation of the Golden Rule and Family Ethics

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree
I Instill Christian moral virtues of solidarity, self-discipline, and honesty within the family.	35	25	7	0	3
Parenting is significantly affected by peer pressure, cultural diversity and economic constraints.	33	20	10	2	5
Support from church initiatives like Caritas Bank, helps me manage familial responsibilities	27	30	8	1	4
I encourage virtues of kindness, respect in my family.	33	32	4	0	1
Caritas Bank and women-led initiatives such as "merry-go-round" enhance resilience in addressing challenges.	35	25	6	1	3
The seminar improved my understanding of the Golden Rule and its role in youth guidance	35	28	5	0	2

The findings emphasize the essential role of women, particularly members of the Catholic Women Association, as key contributors to youth moral development. The seminar highlighted the CWA's dedication to upholding the Golden Rule as a guiding principle for fostering ethical values, despite facing challenges such as peer pressure and economic hardships. Women-led households demonstrated remarkable resilience by utilizing Church-supported initiatives like Caritas Banks and "merry-go-rounds" to navigate familial responsibilities and nurture virtues such as honesty, self-discipline, and solidarity. However, the sustainability of these efforts hinges on external support, particularly from governmental institutions, to alleviate economic constraints and amplify the impact of such initiatives.

5.3.1.5 The Role of the County Government of Kilifi

The County Government of Kilifi stands as a crucial stakeholder in championing the values of the Golden Rule to counter moral relativism among the youth. This is done fostering partnerships with educational institutions through bursary funds for the needy children, faith-based organizations, and community groups. The government has strategically implemented programs that nurture moral clarity, communal responsibility, and ethical behaviour. These efforts emphasize the importance of treating others humanly with dignity and respect, cultivating an ethical foundation within the youth that transcends cultural and ideological barriers. Despite the pervasive challenges faced by the County, such as economic instability and insecurity, the County government remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting initiatives that empower young people to embrace universal moral principles. Jeremiah Nyagah has observe that:

> The Kenya Youth Economic Empowerment Program (KYEEP) exemplifies the practical application of the Golden Rule in fostering ethical development and mitigating moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi County. Through vocational training and agricultural interventions, KYEEP cultivates values such as honesty, respect, solidarity, and shared responsibility, equipping young individuals with life skills essential for ethical and communal growth.[590]

To explore how the County Government of Kilifi fosters the principle of the Golden Rule to address moral relativism among the youth, a qualitative case study was conducted with 10 village elders from Maweni and Kwa Kazego in Kikambala. Detailed explanations of the concepts were provided beforehand to ensure informed and meaningful discussions. The elders,

[590] Jeremiah Nyagah, "Kenya Youth Economic Empowerment Program (KYEEP)," retrieved from https://www.wvi.org/kenya/kenya-youth-economic-empowerment-program-kyeep (accessed 17/04/2025).

esteemed for their wisdom and knowledge of community dynamics, shared valuable insights into government-led strategies for instilling ethical principles, including empathy, respect, and mutual responsibility, as key components of ethical living. The elders' reflections provided valuable practical examples of the initiatives and their broader impact on community cohesion and youth moral development. Their perspectives, captured through semi-structured interviews, were aligned with the study's objectives. The findings were systematically analyzed and presented using a Likert scale, as outlined in the table below.

Table 4: Findings on County Government of Kilifi's Strategies for Promoting the Golden Rule and Mitigating Moral Relativism among the Youth

Theme	**Statement**	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Promotion of ethical values	The County foster mutual responsibility and empathy among the youth	6	3	1	0	0
Community engagement strategies	The County collaborates effectively with the elders and the community to promote ethical principles.	5	4	1	0	0
Youth centered initiatives	Programs implemented by the County address moral relativism among the youth.	7	2	1	0	0
Elders participation in moral development	Village elders play a critical role in facilitating value-based mentorship for the youth and counselling.	8	1	1	0	0
Addressing multicultural challenges	The county effectively addresses cultural and ideological diversity in promoting moral clarity.	6	3	1	0	0

The findings indicate that the County Government of Kilifi effectively promotes the Golden Rule by fostering ethical values such as empathy and mutual respect, with the majority of respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing on its significance. Elders also affirmed the government's role in community engagement and mentorship programs, highlighting their

impact on addressing moral relativism among the youth. Moreover, addressing multicultural challenges was seen as critical to nurturing moral clarity and unity within the community. These findings underscore the importance of collaborative efforts between the government, elders, and the community in fostering ethical principles for youth development.

5.3.1.6 The Role of Youth in Curbing Relativism

The youth of Kilifi Deanery play a central role in the application of the Golden Rule as a means of addressing the challenges posed by moral relativism within their communities. In his message for the XXXVIII World Youth Day, Pope Francis emphasized the vital importance of young people, describing them as the "joyful hope of the Church and of a humanity always on the move."[591] This statement recognizes their vital role in shaping both Church and society. Their energy and moral sensitivity make them key agents of unity and transformation. Pope's message reinforces the responsibility and transformative potential of young people as key agents of change, particularly in their efforts to apply the Golden Rule in countering moral relativism.

Fieldwork conducted in Kilifi Deanery explored the active engagement of youth in mitigating moral relativism through the practical application of the Golden Rule. Utilizing a combination of observational methods, youth interviews, and a seminar, the study provided an interactive platform for participants to share their experiences, aspirations, and challenges in fostering ethical values. The seminar yielded rich insights into the youth's proactive efforts to promote shared responsibility, mutual respect, and empathy within their communities. These diverse approaches revealed a wide range of significant activities undertaken by the youth, underscoring their role as indispensable stakeholders in nurturing a morally grounded and ethically consistent society. Below is a summary of the findings.

[591] Message of Pope Francis for the XXXVIII World Youth Day "Rejoicing in Hope" (Rom 12:12) 6 November 2023.

Table 5: Application of the Golden Rule: Youth-Led Activities and Their Impact

Activity	**Description**	**Impact**
Community Service Projects	Youth groups engage in initiatives such as cleaning public spaces, visit the elderly and the sick	Foster empathy, selflessness and shared responsibility, exemplifying the Golden Rule.
Peer Mentorship Programs	Young leaders provide guidance to their peers on ethical decision – making and conflict resolution	Promote fairness, mutual respect and consistent moral development among youth.
Interfaith and intercultural dialogue	Youth organize forums that bring together individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.	Reinforces unity and positions and positions the Golden Rule as a unifying principle that transcends differences.
Youth-led Workshops and Seminars	Youth lead sessions on ethical leadership, social responsibility and practical application of the Golden Rule.	Equips participants with skills to navigate ethical challenges and fosters social cohesion.
Creative Advocacy through Arts and Media	Youth utilize, art, music, drama, social media to advocate for ethical living and moral values.	Raises awareness of kindness and respect, making the Golden Rule relatable and impactful for wider audiences.
Conflict Resolution Initiatives	Youth mediate disputes within their communities applying principles of fairness and understanding.	Builds a culture of harmony and mutual respect, reducing conflict and encouraging ethical engagement.

The findings highlight the pivotal role of youth in Kilifi Deanery as key agents in applying the Golden Rule to address moral relativism. Through activities such as community service, peer mentorship, and conflict resolution, they foster empathy, shared responsibility, mutual respect, and harmony. Initiatives like interfaith dialogue and creative advocacy promote unity and ethical awareness, while workshops equip participants with skills to navigate moral challenges. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate the youth's significant impact in cultivating ethical consistency and a morally grounded society.

Despite notable progress in applying the Golden Rule to counter moral relativism among youth, Kilifi Deanery still faces significant pastoral gaps rooted in cultural complexity, insecurity, and social disparities. Addressing these concerns requires renewed ecclesial strategies that prioritize mentorship, intergenerational dialogue, and contextual engagement with scripture and tradition. Echoing the prophetic call to "set things right" (Is 1:18), this study underscores the

need for collaborative action among clergy, religious, parents, educators, and Church leaders. Strengthening these efforts will empower youth to live out Christian virtues with greater conviction, laying the foundation for the following moral theological recommendations.

5.4 Moral Theological Recommendations

To address the challenges of moral relativism in the Catholic Church of Kilifi Deanery, this study proposes strategic interventions aimed at empowering the youth and reinforcing Christian ethics. These recommendations prioritize fostering synodal spirit in youth ministry, forming pastoral agents, revisiting catechesis, and integrating the Ubuntu philosophy as a cultural framework. Additional strategies include marriage preparation, pastoral ministry for political leaders, promoting pastoral integrity, enhancing ecumenical dialogue, adopting synodal leadership principles, and establishing an advisory board for moral empowerment. Together, these measures aim to strengthen the Church's relevance and effectiveness in guiding the youth toward moral and ethical resilience.

5.4.1 Fostering Synodality in Youth Ministry

To effectively address the challenges of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery, it is essential to adopt a synodal approach within youth ministry. This involves creating inclusive environments where collaboration, dialogue, and shared discernment thrive among all agents of evangelization. By fostering these communal spaces, the Church can provide a stable foundation for young people to anchor their moral values in shared Christian principles, counteracting the tendency toward individualistic and relativistic outlooks. In his address to participants in the Second Synodal Assembly of the Churches in Italy, Pope Francis reminded them that "the Church is made by the people of God who walk together, and that Christian joy does not come from easy solutions to problems but from the certainty that the Lord never abandons us."[592] It means that the Church has known how to synod. This underscores the Church's historical capacity to engage in Synodality. Pope Francis consistently highlights the Church's ability to progress collectively in communion, participation, and mission, principles that are central to the synod on Synodality.

[592] Francis's address to participants in the Second Synodal Assembly of Churches gathered in the Vatican, March 31 to April 3, 2021.

Justin Clemency Nabushawo writes that "Africans value communal relations. Consequently, people are invited to dialogue, with the aim of restoring disrupted unity."[593]Justin's observation underscore values such as respect for elders and authority, communal responsibility, Ubuntu (interconnectedness and compassion), moral integrity, and active faith and spirituality have been disrupted by external influences and the growing prevalence of moral relativism. These disruptions have fostered individualism, eroded empathy, and weakened engagement with religious practices among the youth. To address these challenges, the Church's synodal mission must focus on fostering dialogue with pastoral agents, families, and young people to revive these values.

Equipping pastoral agents with the necessary skills for effective guidance, fostering shared accountability in upholding Gospel teachings, revitalizing moral education rooted in African traditions, and enhancing ecumenical collaboration are essential steps for strengthening unity and collective efforts. These measures will enable the Church in Kilifi to mitigate the effects of relativism, reaffirm its vital role in preserving social harmony, and reinforce foundational African values of communality. A synodal Church will encourage the youth to actively engage in their faith journey through conversations and collaborative activities that emphasize consistent moral principles, such as the Golden Rule. By nurturing a sense of belonging and accountability to a shared moral framework, this approach will effectively address the challenges of individualism and the subjectivity central to moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi deanery.

Jos Moons states that the synodal ecclesial renewal that Pope Francis is inviting the Church is commonly interpreted as "a creative reception of the Vatican Council II."[594] Synodality in its current form represents renewal. This holds significant relevance to our objectives of addressing the challenges of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery, as it calls for a collaborative and inclusive approach for renewal. Fostering Synodality in youth ministry will provide a platform for all pastoral agents. This will enable the clergy, consecrated

[593] Justin Clemency Nabushawo, "Dialogue and Conflict Resolution in Our Churches: Lessons and Failings Since *Ecclessia in Africa*," in *Faith in Action Pastoral Renewal, Public Health and the Prophetic Mission of the Church in Africa Since the Two African Synods*, eds, Stan Chu Ilo, Justin C. Nabushawo, Ikenna U. Okafor (Abuja, Nigeria: Paulines Publications, 2000), 53-88, 63-64.

[594] Jos Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod: Pope Francis's Creative Reception of the Second Vatican Council," retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00405639221151167#fn2-00405639221151167 (accessed 19/03/2025).

men and women, catechists, parents, educators, and the wider community to engage collectively in guiding the youth. Practical measures, such as organizing open forums, can facilitate discussions on critical moral issues like peer pressure, social media influence, and substance abuse which are rampart among youth. These discussions anchored in the Golden Rule will promote a consistent and faith-centered moral framework.

Through these avenues, parents can play an active role by leading family-based initiatives such as charity drives, which reinforce shared responsibilities and strengthen familial bonds. The clergy and consecrated persons can focus on pastoral care and spiritual guidance and counselling, creating an environment that nurtures trust and ethical formation. Catechists and educators can integrate moral teachings into their programs, ensuring that youth are equipped with tools to navigate complex social dynamics. Youth can take initiate mentorship programs and organize workshops that promote ethical living and mutual respect. Through these collective efforts, the Church in Kilifi Deanery can build a unified and morally grounded community that empowers the youth to resist the individualism of relativism while embracing shared Christian values and principles. This integrated approach not only addresses the immediate challenges but also fosters a sustainable model of communal growth and spiritual renewal. However, central to the effectiveness of this approach is the question of whether the agents of evangelization themselves are adequately formed and prepared for this critical mission.

5.4.2 Formation of Pastoral Agents

The Synthesis Report affirms that the Church is not only entrusted with a mission—it is mission. As Christ proclaims, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). This mission belongs to all the baptized, united as evangelizers journeying toward the Kingdom of God. Pope Paul VI emphasized, "Church exists in order to evangelize."[595] In this spirit, Kilifi Deanery must embrace Synodality to encourage full participation, especially in forming youth who face moral relativism shaped by cultural fragmentation and secular ideologies. The formation of pastoral agents is critical for addressing this challenge. Their training must be theological, spiritual, and practical, preparing them to guide and mentor effectively. Vatican II, *Ad Gentes* recognizes this need: "… all missionaries - priests, Brothers, Sisters, and lay folk -

[595] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* On Evangelization in the Modern World (December 8, 1975): *Acta Apostoliae Sedis* 68 (1975), no. 14.

each according to their own state, should be prepared and trained, lest they be found unequal to the demands of their future work …"[596] Formation must begin early and continue through life. Vatican II's *Apostolicam Actuositatem* affirms:

> ... Training them in a religious way of life and a Catholic way of thinking … The training for the apostolate should start with the children's earliest education. In a special way, however, adolescents and young persons should be initiated into the apostolate and imbued with its spirit. This formation must be perfected throughout their whole life in keeping with the demands of new responsibilities. It is evident, therefore, that those who have the obligation to provide a Christian education also have the duty of providing formation for the apostolate.[597]

Apostolicam Actuositatem underscores the importance of well-formed pastoral agents as essential bridges between the Gospel and the lived realities of young people. They offer moral and spiritual leadership, cultivate understanding, and nurture charisms. Their guidance enables youth to embrace Christian values and missionary discipleship, strengthening the Church's evangelizing mission. Pope Francis consistently emphasizes the importance of a "Church which goes forth."[598] This underscores the need for a church that actively reaches out beyond its walls for evangelization, a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive. The Church's engagement with young people must extend beyond traditional institutional settings, in order to embrace their diverse realities with empathy and Gospel-driven hope. Pope Francis calls them to "embrace their vocation as 'pilgrims of hope,' dedicating their lives in service to others as a response to God's love."[599] This mission requires pastoral agents to actively connect with youth in their lived environments such as schools, social spaces, and digital platforms, offering moral and spiritual guidance relevant to their daily struggles.

Addressing challenges such as moral relativism, poverty, unemployment, and social fragmentation demands a pastoral approach that is adaptable and deeply rooted in Gospel values. For instance, mentorship programs in schools provide ethical direction to young people facing societal pressures, while online faith communities create safe spaces for discussions on

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[596] Vatican Council II, Decree On the Mission Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965), 947–990, no. 26.
[597] Vatican Council II, Decree On the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966), 837-864, nos. 17 & 30.
[598] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24.
[599] Francis, "Pope to Young People: Embrace Vocation as 'Pilgrims of Hope,'" retrieved from ttps://www.maryknollmagazine.org/2025/03/pope-to-young-people-embrace-vocation-as-pilgrims-of-hope/#:~:text=The%20Vatican%20released%20the%20pope's%20message%2C%20titled%20"Pilgrims,faith%20courageously%20amid%20economic%2C%20social%20and%20spiritual%20challenges (accessed 27/05/2025).

spirituality and personal dilemmas. By transcending institutional confines and engaging with the complexities of contemporary youth life, the Church ensures that its mission remains transformative, equipping the next generation with resilience, purpose, and faith-centered solutions. Strengthening pastoral formation is crucial in enabling agents to respond effectively to evolving societal dynamics and reinforce Christian values in shaping a Christ-centered future generation.

The Church's mission demands ongoing evangelization, as Pope Paul VI emphasized, requiring it "to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons of hoping, to the new commandment of love … if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel… in order to evangelize the world with credibility."[600] Formation is essential for fostering a dynamic and inclusive Church that empowers all people, especially youth, in its mission. Pope John Paul II affirms that "such formation is essentially founded on the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral areas,"[601] highlighting its necessity for all pastoral agents, not just clergy. Moreover, in *Ecclesia in Africa*, he underscored the importance of training pastoral agents arguing:

> ... The whole community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization, each according to his or her specific role within the Church. Evangelization must denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys the person. The condemnation of evils and injustices is also part of that ministry of evangelization in the social field which is an aspect of the Church's prophetic role. But it should be made clear that proclamation is always more important than condemnation...[602]

Drawing from *Ecclesia in Africa*, the Synod Fathers emphasize the Church as a family."[603] This model is rooted in unity, collaboration and shared responsibility. This vision calls all members, each in their unique role, to be actively involved in evangelization, especially in response to challenges like moral relativism among the youth. To actualize this vision in the deanery, pastoral agents must receive formation tailored to their roles. Their mission goes beyond Church walls, requiring close engagement with young people to nurture faith and resilience. Elizabeth Nduku emphasizes this collective mission: "Since the Church in Africa has taken on a model of the family, she must walk and work together to

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[600] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15.
[601] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day ((March 15, 1992), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 84 (1992): 657–864, 42.
[602] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 53 & 70.
[603] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 89.

accomplish the mission of Christ."[604] Empowering each group: clergy, consecrated persons, catechists, and lay faithful, is essential for advancing the Kingdom of God. As Pope Paul VI reminds us: "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself."[605] Ongoing formation ensures pastoral agents remain effective, renewed, and grounded in their call to serve.

5.4.2.1 Ongoing Formation for the Clergy

Ordained ministers serve as custodians of faith and moral integrity, playing a vital role in evangelization and pastoral care. Their vocation is rooted in unity and collaboration, guiding communities in spiritual growth and ethical discernment, especially among youth. The Second Vatican Council, *Optatam Totius*, underscores this pastoral responsibility: "the desired renewal of the whole Church depends to a great extent on the ministry of its priests… adapted to the particular circumstances of the times and localities so that the priestly training will always be in tune with the pastoral needs of those regions in which the ministry is to be exercised."[606] Recognizing evolving pastoral challenges, Cecil McGarry, after the 1999 First Special Assembly for Africa, emphasized: "seminary training and ongoing priestly formation, ensuring that bishops remain equipped with the Gospel's transformative message."[607] Pope John Paul II, in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, acknowledges changing cultural and ecclesial landscapes. He highlights the urgency for dynamic, responsive formation:

> The new generation of those called to the ministerial priesthood display different characteristics in comparison to those of their immediate predecessors. In addition, they live in a world which in many respects is new and undergoing rapid and continual evolution. All of this cannot be ignored when it comes to programming and carrying out the various phases of formation for those approaching the ministerial priesthood...[608]

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[604] Elizabeth Nduku, "Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements in Africa: A Charismatic Sign," in *Journeying Together in Hope: A Theological and Pastoral Reflection for a Synodal Church in Africa* (eds.), Stan Chu Ilo & Leonida Katunge (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2024), 157-169, 169.

[605] Paul VI Apostolic Exhortations, *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* On Evangelization in the Modern World (December 8, 1975): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis,* 68 (1975), 5–76, no. 15.

[606] Vatican Council II, Decree, On Priestly Training *Optatam Totius* (October 28, 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 58 (1966), 713-727, no. 1.

[607] Cecil McGarry, "The Implications of the Synod Disseminations for the Church in Africa," *African Ecclesia Review* 37 (1999), 15-33.

[608] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis,* On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day (March 15, 1992): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 84 (1992), 657–804, no. 3.

This perspective affirms the importance of renewing priestly formation to address youth moral uncertainty caused by cultural and ideological shifts. Priests must be equipped to engage the youth with wisdom and pastoral sensitivity, offering moral guidance rooted in Gospel values. As John Paul II further explains: "priest's formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character… The whole training of the students should have as its object to make them true shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd."[609] Such formation enables priests to offer catechesis, mentorship, and faith-based dialogue that cultivates critical thinking and moral clarity among youth. Well-formed clergy also serve as mentors to other pastoral agents, reinforcing stable and consistent moral teaching within parish communities. As Pawel Rytel noted: "The increasing demands of priestly service in today's world and the importance of ongoing formation and learning."[610]

Rytel's statement points to the growing complexity of priestly ministry in today's society. Priests face more responsibilities and challenges than before. These include engaging youth, addressing moral confusion, and responding to social change. To meet these demands, they must continue learning and deepening their formation. Initial seminary training is no longer enough. Ongoing formation helps priests stay rooted in the Gospel and respond effectively to the needs of their communities. Pope Francis adds urgency to this call by affirming the role of youth in the present life of the Church:

> … We cannot just say that young people are the future of our world. They are its present; even now, they are helping to enrich it. Young people are no longer children. They are at a time of life when they begin to assume a number of responsibilities, sharing alongside adults in the growth of the family, society and the Church. We adults can often be tempted to list all the problems and failings of today's young people. Perhaps some will find it praiseworthy that we seem so expert in discerning difficulties and dangers. But what would be the result of such an attitude? Greater distance, less closeness, less mutual assistance.[611]

[609] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis,* no. 57.

[610] Pawel Rytel, "We Need our Priests and they Need Ongoing Formation," retrieved from https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2024-02/acn-interview-conference-priests-and-they-need-ongoing-formation.html#:~:text=Over%20one%20thousand%20priests%20from%20over%20sixty%20countries,ongoing%20support%20and%20learning.%20By%20Fr.%20Pawel%20Rytel-Andrianik (accessed 11/04/2025). "This was a message during the conference on ongoing priest formation with the theme *"Fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess (2 Tim 1:6). The beauty of being disciples today: a singular, integral, communitarian, and missionary formation.*"

[611] Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (March 25, 2019), nos. 64 & 66.

In the context of Kilifi Deanery, Pope Francis's message highlights the need to recognize youth not just as future leaders but as active contributors in the Church today. It urges clergy and pastoral agents to move beyond criticism and instead foster close, supportive relationships with young people. This perspective challenges the Church in Kilifi to prioritize mentorship, dialogue, and inclusive evangelization that values youth voices in addressing moral relativism and cultural shifts. By engaging youth now, the Church strengthens its mission and builds a more connected, resilient faith community.

5.4.2.2 Consecrated Persons

Consecrated persons play an essential role in shaping the future of young people within both ecclesial and societal contexts. Through their engagement in catechesis, education, healthcare, and social services, they promote the dignity and worth of every individual. Motivated by vocation, their contribution fosters holistic development within communities and strengthens the Church's mission. As John Baur noted: "Christianity in Africa will be what the African Sisters will make it."[612] Their ministries serve as platforms for evangelization, guiding young people in values formation and ethical discernment. Acting as spiritual mothers, educators, counselors, and mentors, they embody transformative discipleship. Confronting contemporary challenges like relativism, they model Gospel values rooted in justice and compassion. Pope John Paul II emphasized: "… they demonstrate courage in the truth and in self-denial, enlightened by joy."[613] In Kilifi County, societal issues such as early marriages and exploitative relationships undermine the well-being of youth, especially young girls. These practices limit access to education and perpetuate cycles of poverty.

Jane Kadzo observes: "these practices severely infringe upon the dignity and rights of these young girls, hindering their ability to contribute meaningfully to society."[614] Our field study revealed cases of underage girls married to older men, resulting in loss of autonomy and restricted educational opportunities. Teen pregnancies and school dropouts are also widespread. Many youth abandon formal education to seek low-skilled jobs or engage in exploitative relationships with tourists. While tourism boosts Kilifi's economy, its social impact raises

[612] John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1994), 410.
[613] Benedict XVI, post-synodal apostolic *Africa Munus,* On the Church in Africa and its Mission of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace (November 19, 2011): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 103 (2011), 741-899, no. 35.
[614] Jane Kadzo, interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 29/02/2024.

concerns over long-term youth development. To counter these challenges, religious institutes have established rescue centers offering support to vulnerable youth. Kikambala Parish hosts the Grandsons of Abraham (for boys) and the Bakhita Rescue Centre (for girls). The sister overseeing both centers describes their mission: "these centers offer essential support, including counseling, spiritual guidance, education, and safe shelter, addressing both immediate and long-term needs."[615] Through mentorship, skill-building, and financial literacy, these centers empower youth to escape cycles of dependence. Such interventions promote resilience, dignity, and social reintegration, reinforcing the moral foundation of the Kilifi community.

5.4.2.3 Formation for the Catechists

Catechists play an essential role in guiding youth toward moral and spiritual clarity, especially in regions like Kilifi Deanery where access to ordained clergy is limited. They serve as teachers of faith and morality, forming the ethical foundations of their communities. The *General Directory for Catechesis* defines a catechist as: "a person who is called to share in the mission of the Church by teaching and nurturing the faith. Catechists play a pivotal role in the transmission of the Gospel, guiding others in their journey of faith."[616] Catechists are the backbone of missionary outreach, sustaining religious formation in remote areas. Despite their critical role, they often receive inadequate training and support. Pope Benedict XVI, in *Africae Munus*, emphasizes their significance:

> Catechists are invaluable pastoral agents in the mission of evangelization. Their role is very important during the first evangelization, the preparation of catechumens and the direction and support of communities. He urge bishops and priests to be concerned for the human, intellectual, doctrinal, moral, spiritual and pastoral formation of catechists. They should pay great attention to the living conditions of catechists, in order to ensure their dignity. Nor should they overlook their legitimate material needs, since the faithful worker in the Lord's vineyard has a right to a just recompense (cf. Mt 20:1-16)…[617]

This call affirms the need for structured and dignified formation. In many parishes, volunteer catechists lack the preparation necessary to engage youth effectively. In Kilifi, they serve as frontline agents in combating moral relativism through scriptural catechesis, mentorship, and ethical dialogue. They organize forums addressing materialism, peer pressure, and cultural

[615] Based on a field study interview with the sister overseeing the Grandsons of Abraham and Bakhita Rescue Centers, it was noted that these institutions play a vital role in transforming the lives of vulnerable young men and women by offering essential support and opportunities for growth.
[616] Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, nos. 231 & 233.
[617] Benedict VI, *Africae Munus*, nos. 125 & 126.

tensions, helping youth make faith-based decisions. A member of the Catholic Men Association (CMA) shared: "catechists act as mentors, providing personalized guidance and role models of virtuous living in the parish."[618] Field research revealed their broader pastoral engagement. They collaborate with families, schools, and parish leaders to foster moral development. Mary Mbeyu observed: "catechists in the parish spearhead initiatives aimed at tackling critical challenges affecting the youth, such as early marriages and school dropouts, while emphasizing the values of education and holistic development."[619] Catechists equip youth with tools to resist relativism and embrace ethical living rooted in Gospel values.

To strengthen their mission, this study recommends several interventions: First, establish ongoing formation programs in Scripture, theology, and Catholic Social Teaching, ensuring they are adequately prepared for their pastoral duties. Second, offer intercultural training to address Kilifi's diverse context. Third, host workshops on contemporary moral challenges like relativism and materialism to equip catechists with practical, faith-based strategies for guiding young people. Fourth, integrate basic mental health and counseling into their formation. This will enable them to support youth experiencing trauma, uncertainty, and ethical struggles more effectively. Finally, provide access to digital tools, updated resources, and modern teaching methods to enhance ability to adapt to societal changes and communicate effectively (to meet the youth were they love most). These efforts will enhance catechists' capacity to guide youth with confidence, uphold moral clarity, and advance the Church's mission in an evolving society.

5.4.2.4 Formation for the Laity

The lay faithful play a central role in the Church's mission by engaging the secular world and embodying Gospel values in civic and social life. According to Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, "The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church."[620] As the majority within the Church, their witness depends on moral integrity, doctrinal knowledge, and the ability to apply Catholic Social Teaching. Proper formation equips them to respond to growing relativism while upholding the Golden Rule in daily life. Church documents including

[618] CMA, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala parish, 29/02/2024.
[619] Mary Mbeyu, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 29/02/2024.
[620] Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965), 5-67, 31.

Apostolicam Actuositatem, *Lumen Gentium, Ad Gentes*, and *Gaudium et Spes*, affirm the vital mission of the laity. Yet, the implementation of supportive structures remains inadequate. *Ad Gentes* states:

> Wherever possible, the laity should be prepared, in more immediate cooperation with the hierarchy, to fulfill a special mission of proclaiming the Gospel and communicating Christian teachings, so that they may add vigor to the nascent Church… Let the clergy ... train the laity to become conscious of the responsibility which they as members of Christ have for all men; let them instruct them deeply in the mystery of Christ, introduce them to practical methods, and be at their side in difficulties...[621]

This directive reinforces the need for structured moral and doctrinal instruction. It calls for practical training that enables laypersons to integrate Christian teachings into family, work, and society. Elizabeth Nduku adds:

> There is need for "preferential option for the laity" for them to actively engage in Christ's threefold mission: Priestly, Prophetic, and Kingly. The laity must receive training in various Church disciplines alongside their professional expertise. This will enable us to cultivate politicians and civic leaders who are morally upright and capable of confronting the social evils prevalent in the society.[622]

Evangelization is relational and diverse, requiring the Church to empower lay persons as co-workers in communion. They must not be regarded as passive recipients but as active participants in the Church's mission. Their involvement in family, workplaces, and society places them in unique positions to embody and spread Gospel values through daily witness. All the baptized are called to evangelize in their own ways as par their vocation for the growth of the church. Pope John Paul II defines evangelization as: "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new. Christians must be formed to live the social implications of the Gospel in such a way that their witness will become a prophetic challenge to whatever hinders the true good…"[623] Formation must be ongoing, not a one-time event. As Nora K. Nonterah emphasizes:

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[621] Vatican Council II, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966), 947–990, no. 21.
[622] Elizabeth Nduku, "Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements in Africa: A Charismatic Sign," in *Journeying Together in Hope: A Theological and Pastoral Reflection for a Synodal Church in Africa (*eds.), Stan Chu Ilo & Leonida Katunge (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2024), 157-169, 169, 159.
[623] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 54.

> If the Christian message brings joy and the laity are to contribute in spreading this joy, the laity must be given the most important tool, which is an adult faith so that their lives become a Gospel that people read. At the level of content, the content must include a conscious and deliberate reform of post-baptismal catechesis. There is need for a more contextual formation of the laity on issues which pertinent to actual daily realities in their daily lives.[624]

The laity are uniquely positioned to bring the Gospel into domains inaccessible to clergy. Therefore, their formation must be transformative. Rosemary Haughton writes: "a transformative formation requires a radical change in the person who undergoes the formation program; this is to mean the ideals inculcated into the person becomes really incarnational in the very life of the people."[625] With firm grounding in Church teaching and Gospel values, lay persons can advance justice, truth, and compassion within society.

In the context of this study, the Kilifi Deanery should prioritize the following areas in lay formation: First, self-deepening of Catholic faith. They themselves shall truly encounter the joy of the Gospel which in the words of Pope Francis, "fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept His offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew."[626] Second, equip them with the understanding of major themes of the Catholic Social Teaching particularly the three key principles: Human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity. These three principles should act as the "bedrock", guide actions and policies to ensure they respect human life, foster community, and promote justice, and inform decision-making in an ethical way. Third, to be helped to develop a spirit of tolerance and respect in relation to religious plurality which is a reality in Kilifi County. These actions will prepare the laity to be effective evangelizers and moral agents, reinforcing the Church's presence in a rapidly evolving society.

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[624] Norah K. Nonterah, "Forming in Adult Faith for African Lay Faithful: A Theological Foundation for Collaborative Ministry and Service", in *Faith in Action, Reimagining the Mission of the Church in Education, Politics and Servant Leadership in Africa*, eds. Stan Chu Ilo, Nora K. Nonterah (Abuja, Nigeria: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020), 238-266, 249.

[625] Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man: A Study of Conversion and Community* (Springfeild: Templegate Publishers, 1980), 7.

[626] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (Dec 2, 2013): *Acta Apostoicae Sedis* 105 (2013), 1019–1137, no. 1.

5.4.2.5 Ongoing Catechesis in the Parish

Ongoing catechesis is essential for promoting human dignity and spiritual maturity, especially in countering moral relativism among the youth. Lifelong faith formation strengthens personal relationships with God and deepens the commitment to baptismal vows. The Church affirms that catechesis is not a one-time event but a continuous journey. All baptized Christians share in the responsibility of faith education. Pope John Paul II reiterates this shared mission: "Catechesis always has been and always will be a work for which the whole Church must feel responsible and must wish to be responsible.[627] This statement highlights the need for systematic and ongoing catechesis to foster moral clarity and spiritual growth. He further defines its purpose as: "an education in the faith... with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."[628] The *General Directory for Catechesis* explains its progressive nature: "Continuing or ongoing education in the faith follows upon basic education and supposes it. Both fulfil two distinct but complementary functions of the ministry of the word while serving the process of continuing conversion."[629]

In Kilifi Deanery, lifelong catechetical formation equips youth to embrace Christian identity, develop moral discernment, and resist relativism. It also promotes communal transformation through deeper discipleship and ethical living. To address moral relativism effectively, parish catechesis must adopt targeted strategies: First, integrate Gospel values into daily moral decision-making, promoting virtues like integrity and compassion. Second, address modern challenges such as materialism, peer pressure, and ethical confusion using Catholic Social Teaching. Third, facilitate interactive learning through workshops, peer dialogues, and mentorship programs. Fourth, contextualize catechesis by incorporating intercultural insights relevant to Kilifi's social realities. Fifth, empower youth as leaders, educators, and facilitators to foster active participation. Sixth, include mental health awareness to help youth manage emotional and social pressures. Seventh, use digital tools and social media to enhance engagement and accessibility. These strategies ensure that catechesis remains relevant, transformative, and responsive to the needs of young people. By doing so, Kilifi Deanery strengthens its mission and forms youth grounded in truth and Gospel values.

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[627] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, On Catechesis in Our Time (16 October 1979): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979), no. 16.
[628] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 18.
[629] Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 69.

5.4.2.5 Revisit Catechesis Methodology

In light of rapid cultural and technological change, catechesis must adopt dynamic methodologies that remain transformative and relevant. Pope Francis affirms: "today the changes taking place in these great spaces and the culture which they create are a privileged locus of the new evangelization. This challenges us to imagine innovative spaces and possibilities … which are more attractive and meaningful."[630] Traditional approaches, though foundational, often fail to engage contemporary challenges such as moral relativism, individualism, and the disconnection between faith and daily life. A renewed methodology should integrate reason, emotion, and sensory experience to foster a deeper relationship with God. This includes theological dialogue, Scripture study, faith sharing and acts of mercy as tools that equip believers to respond to relativistic ideologies. Spiritual formation must also involve liturgy, contemplative prayer, and retreats that nurture interiority and God-centered living.

Pope Francis notes the Church's prophetic role in fragmented contexts: "various subcultures exist side by side, and often practice segregation and violence. The Church is called to be at the service of a difficult dialogue."[631] Such contexts, as evident in Kilifi Deanery, demand catechetical approaches that cultivate conscience formation through moral case studies, ethical reflection, and Catholic Social Teaching. Practical methods such as mentorship, ethical discourse, and community engagement, can help youth translate Gospel values into life experiences. This moves catechesis beyond instruction into active discipleship. John Mbuya noted that "for catechist to be effective, catechesis must be contextualized and accessible. Strategies such as digital engagement, intercultural dialogue, and youth-led initiatives ensures learning is participatory and faith is lived authentically."[632] Moreover, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), while vital for new converts, lacks provisions for ongoing adult formation. This gap calls for reform, establishing lifelong faith development for all baptized members. Lay formation must go beyond initial immersion and promote holistic conversion (metanoia), rooted in deep belief and personal transformation.

[630] Francis, Francis, Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 73.
[631] Francis, Francis, Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 74.
[632] John Mbuya, interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 27/02.2025.

5.4.2.6 Ubuntu Philosophy: A 'Gaon' for Countering Relativism

The integration of African moral values is vital in shaping ethically conscious youth. Nicholas Segeja observes: "what is common in the application of African methods and approaches among other things, is precisely the ability to reverentially engage all in friendly, supportive, and collaborative dialogue open for mutual learning, communal, and continual discernment."[633] These values reflect the Golden Rule and promote peaceful dialogue and mutual understanding as embedded in Ubuntu philosophy. In calculating these values in youth formation promote moral development rooted in shared cultural heritage. Ubuntu aligns with Harambee (collective effort) and Ujamaa (familyhood), reinforcing the person-in-community perspective. According to Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, "Ubuntu philosophy means grounded in the fundamental understanding of person-in-community as wholeness, relationality and solidarity."[634] Samkange and Samkange echo that, "Indigenous African philosophy whose three aspects are humanity, the sanctity of life and people-centered status."[635]

Josee Ngalula adds that "in Bantu languages, a person who does not live in good relationships with others is spoken as not at all a *buntula muntu*, human person."[636] These philosophies affirm that moral development thrives in communal contexts. John Mbiti emphasizes: "nature brings the child into the world, but the society creates the child into a social being, a corporate person. For it is the community which protects the child, feeds it, bring it up, educate it and in many other ways incorporate it into the wider community."[637] The New Dictionary of Christian Ethics defines community as "a space formed by shared values..."[638] Bénézét Bujo notes: "the community is expected to enhance the lives of its members; because it cannot exist without them."[639] In Kilifi Deanery, ethical formation rooted in communal

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[633] Nicholas Segeja, "Structures for Participation," in *Journeying Together in Hope: A Theological and Pastoral Reflection for a Synodal Church in Africa* (eds.), Stan Chu Ilo & Leonida Katunge (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2024), 277-294, 283.
[634] Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, "Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Becoming Church: Practice, Progress and Prospects," in *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-looking Church* (eds.), Klaus Krämer (Philippines: Claretian Communications Foundation, 2013), 113-125.
[635] Samkange & Samkange, "Hunhuism or ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indigenous Political Philosophy," retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02615479.2023.2168638 (accessed 03/04/2025).
[636] Josee Ngalula, "Obuntu and Solidarity," in *Journeying Together for a Synodal Church in Africa: Echoes from an African Christian Palaver* (eds.), Ikenna U. Okafa (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2023), 123-136, 124.
[637] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 110.
[638] Henry Clark, "Community," in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics (*eds.), John Macquarie and James Childress, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1997), 105-106.
[639] Bénézét Bujo, *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2009), 21.

discernment can help youth resist moral relativism. Yet, social issues such as idleness, materialism, theft, promiscuity, and violence, continue to threaten human dignity. Melchior Marandu affirms: "African communities successfully maintained peace and harmony by employing community-based approaches to resolve conflicts."[640] John Mbiti cautions:

> The shift from communal solidarity encapsulated in "I am, because we are" is constantly being smashed, undermined and in some respects destroyed. Emphasis is shifting from the 'we' of traditional religious corporateness to the 'I' of modern individualism… an orientation towards individualism, away from corporateness…[641]

Modern pressures have weakened support systems and distanced youth from cultural heritage. A balanced model combining Ubuntu values with moderated individualism is needed. The Church in Kilifi can respond through mentorship, cultural education, marriage preparation, and intergenerational collaboration. Elders, as custodians of wisdom, pass moral instruction through proverbs such as: "Samaki mkunje angali mbichi" ("Mold the fish while it's still fresh"), emphasizing early moral formation, and "Akili ni mali" ("Wisdom is a valuable asset"). Reviving these frameworks helps youth embrace shared responsibility and reconnect with community. Ubuntu acts as a 'gaon', a symbolic cloth, enveloping them in connectedness, respect, and moral accountability. This foundation safeguards cultural heritage and cultivates morally grounded individuals capable of countering relativism.

5.4.2.6 Marriage Preparation: A Remedy for Curbing Youth Relativism

In Kilifi Deanery, where moral relativism shapes youth perceptions of relationships, structured marriage preparation is vital for fostering stability and moral clarity. Relativism, marked by rejection of absolute truths, has weakened commitment to love, responsibility, and lifelong marriage. Societal influences such as individualism, materialism, and fragile family structures make it difficult for youth to appreciate marriage as a vocation. Pope Francis warns:

> The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, and social bonds…, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed

[640] Melchior Marandu, "Universal Brokenness and Social Sin," in *Justice and Governance in Africa HEKIMA Review Journal of Theology, Governance and Peace Studies*, no. 60 (December, 2019): 56-64.
[641] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 224-225. See also Bishop George Tambala, "The African Church Between and After the Synods for Africa: The Emerging Challenges and Questions," in *Faith in Action, Reimagining the Mission of the Church in Education, Politics and Servant Leadership in Africa* (eds.), Stan Chu Ilo, Nora K. Nonterah (Abuja, Nigeria: Paulines Publications Africa, 2020), 137-156, 141-142.

> in any way or modified at will. He added that, the individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds.[642]

In Kilifi, youth often view marriage through a lens of personal convenience, disregarding its ethical and spiritual depth. The rise in unstable unions and distorted views of love calls for robust preparation. Catechesis, mentorship, and family engagement can instill virtues of fidelity, respect, and responsibility. Integration of Catholic Social Teaching and psychological guidance strengthens relational maturity and emotional resilience. Effective preparation must involve parents in promoting family stability. The Church's document, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage (Pontifical Council for the Family)*, outlines three phases: "remote, proximate, immediate."[643] Despite this framework and the importance of this document, its principles are often inadequately implemented in many parishes. John Burke notes that "Despite the importance of these institutions, it is unfortunate that people prepare themselves so poorly for such a serious lifelong vocation."[644] Often, marriage preparation lasts one week, insufficient for the gravity of the sacrament. Unlike formation for priesthood or religious life, marriage receives minimal attention.

Andrew E. Lujuo adds: "Knowing very well that changes have taken place and families are facing so many attacks, causing what we may call de-traditionalization and secularization, young people receive only the minimum assistance required for them to understand Christian marriage values."[645] To address youth relativism through marriage preparation, the study recommends: First, ethical foundations rooted in objective principles like the Golden Rule. Second, faith-based education to affirm marriage's sanctity and communal value. Third, holistic formation promoting empathy, commitment, and spiritual depth. Fourth, workshops addressing cultural pressures and redefining marriage as covenant. Fifth, family apostolates sharing lived experiences to strengthen traditional values. Sixth, parish mentors offering pastoral guidance rooted in Gospel values. Finally, ongoing formation to sustain growth and deepen relational

[642] Francis, Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 66 & 67.
[643] Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (13 May 1996), no. 5.
[644] John Burke, *Preparation for Marriage: What a Catholic Should Know* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1990), 25.
[645] Andrew E. Lujuo, *Canonical Implications of HIV/AIDSS on Canonical Marriage in the Archdiocese of Nairobi with Special Reference to Kibra Slams* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2015), 123.

understanding. These strategies empower youth with clarity, resilience, and moral conviction in their marital journey.

5.4.2.7 Pastoral Ministry for Politicians: A Strategy in Mitigating Youth Relativism

In a time marked by cultural shifts and diminishing moral absolutes, pastoral care for political leaders serves as a strategic tool in addressing youth relativism. As public figures, politicians shape social norms and influence youth values. Spiritual guidance and moral accountability can foster ethical governance and promote ideals that encourage responsibility among young people. Vatican Council II emphasizes: "on their own responsibility as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience… the lay faithful exercise their proper task of infusing the temporal order with Christian values…."[646] Saint Thomas More remains a model of ethical leadership. His unwavering moral integrity demonstrates the inseparability of faith and public service. Pope John Paul II affirmed that, "Saint Thomas More refused to compromise, never forsaking the "constant fidelity to legitimate authority and institutions which distinguished him, Thomas More taught by his life and his death that man cannot be separated from God, nor politics from morality."[647] In Kilifi Deanery, political leaders play a significant role in shaping youth perspectives and so the need for their formation.

Code of Canon Law upholds clerical boundaries: "clerics are prohibited from assuming public offices that involve participation in civil power."[648] However, Canon 564 allows clergy to provide moral and spiritual guidance to political leaders, as outlined in the role of chaplains, who offer pastoral care to specific communities, including those in public service. This ministry is vital in shaping ethical leadership, fostering integrity, and countering relativistic tendencies.[649] This ministry is vital for promoting ethical leadership and countering cultural relativism. The *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* warns:

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[646] Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966), 1025-1115, nos. 76 & 36.
[647] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* Proclaiming Saint Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians (October 31, 2000): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 93 (2001), no. 76 & 4.
[648] *Code of Canon Law* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), no. 285 §3.
[649] *Code of Canon Law*, no. 564.

> … One cannot close one's eyes to the real dangers which certain tendencies in society …are promoting through legislation, nor can one ignore the effects this will have on future generations. A kind of cultural relativism exists today, evident in the conceptualization and defense of an ethical pluralism, which sanctions the decadence and disintegration of reason and the principles of the natural moral law.[650]

Political leaders, guided by Catholic Social Teaching, can foster justice, integrity, and ethical standards. Their policies shape youth values; thus, faith-informed leadership is essential. Pastoral accompaniment can help the leaders to resist harmful legislation and uphold moral principles. This includes addressing issues like substance abuse, corruption, abduction, unemployment, and misuse of digital platforms. Advocacy for rehabilitation, vocational training, and digital literacy can strengthens the moral and social fabric. Pastoral ministry to politicians ensures that leadership remains accountable to ethical truth. When rooted in Gospel values, governance can serve as a witness of virtue, guiding youth toward moral clarity and responsible citizenship.

5.4.2.8 Need for Pastoral Integrity

Pastoral integrity is essential for guiding young people toward moral and spiritual maturity, especially in Kilifi, where relativism challenges ethical clarity and commitment to faith. The credibility of pastoral agents strengthens the Church's witness, reinforcing absolute truth in an age marked by subjective morality. When leaders embody Gospel values, they foster trust and make faith a lived experience. Pope Paul VI affirms: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."[651] Witness, not words alone, lends authenticity and inspires moral clarity. Pastoral agents must align their behaviour with their teachings to guide youth effectively. Strengthening integrity through ongoing formation, ethical leadership, and accountability ensures catechesis remains transformative. Pope Francis urges clergy to live closely with their communities as: "shepherds with the smell of the sheep."[652] This proximity builds credibility and supports evangelization. Philip Kosloski also notes that, "While truth is very powerful and can change the

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[650] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), no. 2.
[651] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Evangelization in the Modern World (December 8th, 1975): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 (1975), 5-76, 41.
[652] Francis, "Pope to priests: Be "shepherds with 'the smell of the sheep'," retrieved from https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-06/pope-francis-priests-students-church-louis-french.html (accessed 27/03.2025).

hearts of many, modern man is very skeptical of the truth and are even more skeptical of those who preach the truth and do not live it out. Those who live wedded to the Truth and clearly show it in their actions are much more persuasive."[653] Authentic leadership empowers young people to resist relativism and embrace a morally grounded, faith-driven life.

5.4.2.9 Enhance Synodal Leadership

Synodal leadership, rooted in the principles of "communion, participation, and mission,"[654] offers a responsive model for youth formation. Pope Francis, in the Synod on Synodality *Vademecum*, calls the Church to reflect deeply on these values. This approach promotes inclusive dialogue, mentorship, and shared responsibility, essential tools for navigating moral dilemmas. It creates participatory spaces that validate youth concerns and reinforce belonging. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) exemplify this model, offering platforms for Scripture reflection, prayer, and ethical discussion. These communities nurture moral values and faith-based decision-making. To strengthen synodal leadership in Kilifi Deanery and address youth relativism.

This study recommends: First, it should actively involve young people in decision-making processes to foster belonging and moral accountability. Second, Small Christian Communities (SCCs) should serve as mentorship spaces, integrating Scripture study, prayer, and ethical discussions to nurture faith-based values. Third, ethical leadership development is essential, mentoring young leaders in integrity, accountability, and service. Fourth, pastoral agents and community leaders must act as role models, guiding youth away from relativistic influences. By implementing these strategies, the Church strengthens youth formation, counteracts moral ambiguity, and cultivates a faith-centered, value-driven culture. These strategies reinforce faith-centered culture and counter moral ambiguity, equipping youth with spiritual confidence and ethical discernment.

[653] Philip Kosloski, "Why Modern Man Listens More Willingly to Witnesses than to Teachers," retrieved from https://www.philipkosloski.com/why-modern-man-listens-more-willingly-to-witnesses-than-to-teachers/ (accessed 27/03/2025).
[654] General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality: Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches: First Phase* (October 2021 – April 2022).

5.4.2.10 Create Advisory Board

Addressing moral relativism among youth in Kilifi Deanery requires a strategic and collaborative framework centered on the establishment of an Advisory Board. This study proposes the creation of active youth ministry office within the Archdiocese to enhance coordination and inclusivity across all deaneries and at all levels. At the Archdiocesan level, the Advisory Board would guide initiatives that align with the Church's mission and ensure cohesive stakeholder collaboration. At the Deanery level, efforts would be contextualized to address local challenges such as peer pressure, radicalization, and social media influences. At the parish level, the Board would tailor diocesan strategies to community needs by promoting programs rooted in Christian virtues and ethical living. Within Small Christian Communities (SCCs), the Board would foster grassroots engagement through open forums, Bible study, and outreach activities focused on moral development and faith formation.

Grounded in the Church's mission to nurture moral foundations, the Board should embrace synodal leadership. It would comprise clergy, consecrated persons, parents, catechists, educators, youth, and community leaders. This will ensure diverse perspectives. Elizabeth Nduku underscores its importance stating that "the advisory board will need to identify priority areas and the key issues affecting the Church ... and look for ways of dealing with them, employing a synodal approach."[655] Complementing this, the development of a comprehensive Pastoral Plan would bridge dialogue and practical action, offering youth a firm moral foundation based on Christian principles. Rodrigo Mejia in his work *From Life to Practical: The Pastoral Cycle*, affirms the necessity of a pastoral plan arguing that "in the name of the freedom of the Spirit that "blows wherever it wants", some pastoral agents neglect proper planning in the name of confidence in divine providence. The Church is not a pure spiritual body. It is a human institution that has to take into consideration all the human factors that can affect our pastoral enterprises."[656] Data from interviews and questionnaires with youth, clergy, catechists, parents, and community leaders reveal persistent challenges: economic hardship, peer pressure, moral ambiguity, and radicalization by groups such as the "Panga Boys." Social media also emerged as

[655] Elizabeth Nduku, "Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements in Africa: A Charismatic Sign," in *Journeying Together in Hope: A Theological and Pastoral Reflection for a Synodal Church in Africa* (eds.), Stan Chu Ilo & Leonida Katunge (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2024), 157-169, 166.
[656] Rodrigo Mejia, "From Life to Practical: The Pastoral Cycle," in *New Strategies for Evangelization in Africa* (ed.), Patrick Ryan (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2002), 111-120, 111.

a destabilizing influence. These realities highlight the urgency for a practical, action-based Pastoral Plan. Rooted in lived experience and informed by community voices, the plan should reinforce ethical and Christian values across SCCs, deaneries, parishes, and the Archdiocese. Anchored in the Golden Rule, this integrated approach aims to empower young people spiritually, socially, and economically. It promotes accountability, resilience, and moral clarity, enabling youth to confront contemporary challenges and live ethically grounded lives.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the moral relevance of the Golden Rule as a foundational principle for countering relativism among youth in Kilifi Deanery. By tracing its philosophical and historical foundations, the study established the Golden Rule as a universal moral standard capable of confronting subjective ethical frameworks. Drawing upon the ethical insights of influential figures and contextual realities in Kilifi, the analysis highlighted how this principle fosters empathy, mutual respect, and responsibility. The Golden Rule emerged not only as a timeless ethical ideal but also as a practical anchor for guiding youth toward moral clarity in an increasingly fragmented society.

The practical integration of this principle within families, Church structures, local institutions, and pastoral strategies revealed its transformative potential in shaping ethically grounded communities. Field research and stakeholder engagement confirmed the urgency of reinforcing shared moral values through inclusive, synodal, and context-responsive approaches. The proposed moral theological and pastoral recommendations, ranging from catechetical innovation to structural planning, offer actionable pathways for moral renewal. As demonstrated throughout the chapter, the Golden Rule can serve as a strategic framework for nurturing integrity, coherence, and moral resilience among youth within Kilifi Deanery.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this research, we have attempted to show how moral relativism presents a significant challenge to the ethical and spiritual formation of youth in Kilifi Deanery. The investigation emerged from a pastoral and theological concern for the shifting moral landscape shaped by cultural transitions, globalization, and weakened communal ties. Through the contextual lens of Kilifi County, we examined the transformation of traditional value systems. These values, once anchored in rites of passage, kinship networks, and communal responsibility, are now increasingly being replaced by ideologies that rank individual autonomy and moral subjectivism. The study emphasized the urgency of reevaluating how young people are formed ethically, especially in environments where community values are eroding and social structures are undergoing rapid change like Kilifi County.

Insights gathered from our field study have shown complex dynamics contributing to moral relativism in this region. Interviews, pastoral reflections, and cultural observations revealed tensions between inherited moral frameworks and emerging ideologies. We saw that youth in Kilifi often wrestle with ambiguous notions of right and wrong, influenced by digital culture, alternative spiritual currents, and contemporary social pressures. The absence of strong moral anchors leaves many without clear guidance, which in turn fosters confusion, vulnerability to harmful behaviours, and diminished communal responsibility. These findings illuminate the deep ethical fragmentation that arises when objective moral principles are weakened or disregarded.

A careful exploration of philosophical and ethical foundations brought to light the intellectual architecture underlying moral relativism and its far-reaching effects on both individual and societal morality. It became evident that in the absence of moral absolutes, ethical decisions risk losing their grounding in truth, human dignity, and communal solidarity. Historical developments and doctrinal deviations illustrated that relativism operates not simply as a theoretical stance but as a practical framework influencing everyday choices and belief systems. In response to this, the study evaluated several ethical theories: deontology, communitarianism, and virtue ethics, as valuable instruments for reconstructing sound moral reasoning. These models offer pathways for ethical reflection that honor cultural context while remaining rooted in enduring principles that support justice, integrity, and the common good.

We have seen that there are theological resources within the Catholic tradition capable of offering meaningful responses to this crisis. Through Scriptural reflection, patristic wisdom, and African theological perspectives. We have identified principles that reaffirm the value of moral objectivity and the importance of grounding ethics in truth. These sources underscore the Church's responsibility in shaping consciences and providing spiritual formation that resonates with local cultures while resisting the fragmentation of moral relativism. The integration of communal ethics and doctrinal clarity offers a pathway to re-establish moral coherence among youth faced with conflicting ideologies in multicultural societies.

To respond to the problem of moral relativism among the youth, this study proposed the Golden Rule as a foundational moral principle. Drawing on its historical universality and its resonance within Catholic teaching, we argued that this ethical saying fosters empathy, responsibility, and moral consistency. In our recommendations, we cited different pastoral strategies including catechetical renewal, family-centered moral formation, and collaborative parish initiatives as ways to apply the Golden Rule in a culturally responsive manner. These approaches, rooted in dialogue and contextual awareness, seek to rebuild ethical resilience among youth and restore a shared sense of moral direction within the community.

From our field findings, we are convinced that an honest study of moral relativism in the broader Archdiocese could offer practical pathways for renewal. It is our hope that this research has provided meaningful insight into the patterns and consequences of relativistic thought and behavior among youth in Kilifi Deanery. The conclusions reached here are not exhaustive, but they raise critical questions about identity, spiritual formation, and the Church's role in moral guidance. As Kilifi continues to navigate cultural change, the promotion of ethical clarity and communal accountability becomes essential. This study affirms the need for sustained engagement, theological depth, and pastoral commitment in confronting moral relativism and shaping a future rooted in justice, solidarity, and faith.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Introduction

I am a post graduate student at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa pursing Doctorate in Moral Theology. I am conducting a research for Doctorate entitled ***THE PRINCIPLE OF THE GOLDEN RULE: A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF MORAL RELATIVISM AMONG THE YOUTH IN KILIFI DEANERY - CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MOMBASA, KENYA.*** This research is a partial fulfilment of Doctorate degree in Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Its intention is to gain a deeper understanding, perception and experience of youth living in Kilifi Deanery on Moral Relativism. The finding of this research will contribute to a deeper analysis of the nature and extension of Moral Relativism among the youth. This will help the researcher to come up with a response to the challenge of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery. The information obtained in this research will be treated with a lot of confidentiality.

Instruction

The first part has closed-ended questions; just tick (√) in the bracket provided. The second part has open-ended questions; write your answers to show your views

Section One: Demographic information

1. Gender

Female ☐ Male ☐

2. Age

18-25 years ☐ 26-30 years ☐ 31-35 years ☐ 36-40 years ☐

3. Level of Education

Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Diploma ☐ Graduates ☐

4. Church Denomination

Catholic ☐ Anglican ☐ Protestant ☐ Any others ☐

5. Main occupation of the respondent

Student ☐ Professional ☐ Business man/ woman ☐ Farmer ☐ Other ☐

Section Two: General Questions

Our description of moral relativism: Moral relativism is the belief that ideas of right and wrong are not the same for everyone, they depend on the person's background, culture, or situation. Instead of having one universal rule that fits all people at all times, moral relativism suggests that each society or individual may have their own way of understanding what is good or bad. For example, an action that is accepted in one community may be seen as wrong in another, and both views can be valid within their own context. This belief encourages people to be open-minded, avoid quick judgment, and try to understand different moral viewpoints. Using the description provided, please share your insights by responding to the following questions. This section has two parts: (a) and (b). You are requested to answer each part as explained.

a) Understanding Moral Relativism and Its Influence on Youth and Society in Kilifi

Drawing from your community's traditions and values, share your thoughts on the following questions. You may include examples to help explain your views.

1. According to your own understanding, how do you describe moral relativism?

   ……

   ……

   ……

2. Can a person's attitude, behaviour, or actions be described as relativistic?

   ……
   ……
   ……

3. What are some clear signs that show someone is acting or thinking in a relativistic way?

   ……
   ……
   ……

4. In what ways has moral relativism affected the moral choices and values of young people?

   ……
   ……
   ……

5. How does moral relativism influence the attitudes of youth in Kilifi towards traditional cultural practices?

   ……
   ……
   ……

6. What factors contribute to moral relativism in your community?

   ……
   ……
   ……

7. How has moral relativism influenced the moral standards and behavior within the wider society?

……
……
……

8. In your opinion, can the traditional values of the Mijikenda (Midzi-Chenda) community help to counter moral relativism among youth today?

……
……
……

9. If yes, how can these values guide or influence moral behaviour in a consistent way?

……
……
……..

10. If no, what challenges or limitations prevent these values from addressing relativism?

……
……
……

b) Moral Relativism and Youth Spirituality in Kilifi Deanery

1. How does moral relativism influence the spiritual practices of youth in Kilifi Deanery?

……
……
……

2. What is the most common spiritual challenge faced by youth in Kilifi Deanery due to moral relativism?

……
……
……

3. Which factor contributes most to moral relativism affecting spiritual life in Kilifi Deanery?

   ……
   ……
   ……

4. How do youth in Kilifi Deanery perceive traditional spiritual values in the context of moral relativism?

   ……
   ……
   ……

5. What role do religious leaders play in addressing moral relativism among youth in Kilifi Deanery?

   ……
   ……
   ……

6. How has moral relativism affected youth participation in church activities in Kilifi Deanery?

   ……
   ……
   ……

7. What strategies can be used to counter the impact of moral relativism on the spiritual life of youth in Kilifi Deanery?

   ……
   ……
   ……

Section Three: Causative Factor Assessment

Part One: Causative factors of moral relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery

	Rating Strength

Reason	Very True	True	Not Sure	Total
Poverty				
Unemployment				
Peer Influence				
Social Media				
Promiscuous behaviors				
Corruption				
Cultural factors				
Foreign Cultures				

Identify the Level of agreement with the provided answer to give data on moral relativism among Youth by ticking in the box provided (v) to match the statement given and level:
1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree, 5=not sure

Statement	Level of Agreement				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
Youth pursue what makes them happy, regardless of objective moral values.					
Moral views depend on one's upbringing and cultural background.					
The influence of foreign cultures has contributed to the erosion of traditional African moral foundations					
Morality is shaped by perception, not by universal rules.					
Individuals decide what is morally right based on personal beliefs.					
Right or wrong is understood through personal					

experience.					
Lack of parental guidance has led to rising indiscipline among young people.					
Right or wrong is understood through personal experience.					
Among youth, relativistic thinking is increasingly common.					
Lack of parental guidance has led to rising indiscipline among young people.					
Different cultures define moral values differently, making morality culturally relative.					
Relativism contributes to the erosion of moral values.					

Part Two: Expressive Forms of Moral Relativism among the youth in Kilifi Deanery

Expression	Rating (how strong)			
	Very Strong	Strong	Neutral	Total
Normalizing behaviors once considered taboo.				
Open resistance to parental authority on moral grounds.				
Youth follow online trends or influencers to shape opinions about right and wrong rather than relying on local teachings.				
Reluctance to define firm boundaries in ethical dilemma				
Attending different spiritual or social movements for curiosity rather than moral conviction.				
Reluctance to define firm boundaries in ethical dilemmas				

Attending different spiritual or social movements for curiosity rather than moral conviction.				
Using phrases like "It depends" in moral conversations in matters of right or wrong.				
Using phrases like "It depends" in moral conversations in matters of right or wrong.				
Drug and substance abuse.				
Casual dating or late night parties becoming common and unproblematic among peer circles				
Not so much interested in spiritual matters.				

Part Three: Spiritual Life and Church Involvement among Youth in Kilifi

Reason	Rating (How Strong)			
	Very Good	Good	Poor	Total
Many youth are less engaged with formal religious gatherings, citing lack of relevance or connection.				
Some youth feel that church leaders are out of touch with their social and moral realities.				
Flexible views on morality have led some to question core teachings and rituals of the church.				
There is a growing belief that spirituality is personal and should not be confined by tradition.				
Youth prefer dynamic and expressive forms of worship, such as praise nights, gospel concerts, or youth fellowships.				
Platforms like TikTok and Instagram shape perceptions of spirituality and expose youth to				

global religious ideas.				
Youth are more likely to attend programs designed specifically for them, such as campus missions or youth camps.				
Some view churches as too focused on money or status, which discourages sincere spiritual engagement.				
Influence of peer pressure on spiritual choices. Decisions around church attendance or spiritual commitment are often shaped by social circles.				
Some young people pursue personal faith through music, nature, or online spaces rather than structured church settings.				

Appendix 2: General Questions for Oral Interview

1. Is moral relativism evident among young people in Kilifi Deanery or within the County?
2. Is it possible to assess or confirm the presence of moral relativism among youth in this region?
3. In what ways has relativistic thinking influenced the ethical behavior of young people, family life, church dynamics, and the broader community?
4. How has moral relativism shaped the approach and effectiveness of evangelization efforts in the deanery?
5. What impression or mindset does moral relativism create among today's youth and those to come?
6. What underlying forces or situations might be triggering relativistic attitudes in the deanery?
7. Is there a pathway to addressing or reversing this moral trend effectively?

8. What practical measures could be taken to respond to the challenges posed by moral relativism?
9. Could the values of the Mijikenda people and the principle of the Golden Rule provide meaningful guidance in confronting relativistic views?
10. Might Christian communal values offer a way to renew moral clarity and discourage relativism in the deanery?

Appendix 3: List of Informants Interviewed in the Months of January and February – 2024 (Name, Place, Date)

1. A Catechist. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 25/02/2024.
2. A Church Moderator. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kilifi, 15/02/2024.
3. A pastoral agent. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 29/01/2024.
4. A village elder. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 18/01/2024.
5. Dama, Jonson. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa Market, 25/02/2024.
6. Dama, Susan. Interviewed by the research, at Majengo, Kikambala Parish, 26/02/2024.
7. Eda, Asha. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 20/01/2024.
8. Juma, John. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 24/02/2024.
9. Juma, Moureen. Interview by the researcher, at Kilifi, 24/02/2024.
10. Kadze, Katana. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 26/02/2024.

11. Kadzo, Jane. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kazengo village, 15/01/2024.

12. Kadzo, Mary. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 17/01/2024.

13. Kadzo, Miriam. Interviewed by the researcher, Kikambala, 28/02/2024.

14. Karisa, John. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 26/02/2024.

15. Karisa, Kazungu. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 17/01/2024.

16. Katana, Joan. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 22/02/2024.

17. Katana, John. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 26/02/2024.

18. Katana, Juma. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 24/02/2024.

19. Kaye, John. Interviewed by the researcher, at Maweni, 27/02/2025.

20. Kazungu, Jane. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kilifi, 20/02/2024.

21. Kazungu, Nelson. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 20/01/2024.

22. Kazungu, Peter. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 27/02/2024.

23. Kenga, Kazungu. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 21/02/2024.

24. Keya, Nelly. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 25/02/2025.

25. Masha, Mary. Interviewed by the researcher, at Majengo, Kikambala, 23/01/2024.

26. Mbaya, John. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa Market, 25/02/2024.

27. Medza, Jennefer. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 20/02.2024.

28. Miriam Juma. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kilifi, 25/02/2024.

29. Muthoni, Jane. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 28/02/2024.

30. Muya, Francis. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kwa Kadzego, 29/02/2024.

31. Muya, John. Interview by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 25/02/2024.

32. Muya, Jonnes. Interviewed by the researcher, at Maweni, Kikambala, 25/02/2024.

33. Mwale, Thomas. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala Parish, 26/02/2024.

34. Mwariga, Joyce. A clinical officer at a government clinic in Kilifi County, interviewed by researcher, at Kilifi, 23/02/2024.

35. Mwenda, Hamisi. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 20/01/2024.

36. Mwenje, John. Interviewed by the researcher, at Kikambala, 27/01/2024.

37. Zubeda, Juma. Interviewed by the researcher, at Mtwapa, 26/02/2024.