

Biblical Wisdom Literature and Rwandan Indigenous Wisdom: A Comparative Study

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Abstract — This study, entitled “Biblical Wisdom Literature and Rwandan Indigenous Wisdom: A Comparative Study,” examines the relationship between biblical wisdom traditions and Rwandan indigenous wisdom, with particular attention to their contributions to moral formation, community life, and contemporary society. The study seeks to determine how biblical and Rwandan wisdom traditions understand human existence, ethical conduct, intergenerational knowledge, and social responsibility. It is guided by the research question: How do biblical wisdom literature and Rwandan indigenous wisdom converge and differ in their understanding of human life and moral responsibility? The study hypothesizes that despite differences in their historical and cultural contexts, biblical and Rwandan indigenous wisdom share significant values that can contribute to contemporary moral and social formation. The main objective is to comparatively examine these traditions and identify their relevance to Rwandan society. A descriptive mixed-methods approach was employed. Data were collected from 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda through structured questionnaires and open-ended questions, complemented by biblical and documentary analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative responses were examined thematically. Findings indicate that 85.7% of respondents identify important similarities between the two wisdom traditions, 82.9% recognize their contribution to moral formation, and 80.0% consider indigenous wisdom relevant to contemporary Christian education. The study concludes that a critical dialogue between biblical and Rwandan indigenous wisdom can strengthen moral education, cultural identity, and social cohesion in Rwanda.

Keywords: Biblical Wisdom; Rwandan Indigenous Wisdom; Comparative Theology; Moral Formation; Cultural Heritage.

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1. Introduction

Wisdom has played a significant role in shaping human communities by providing guidance concerning morality, relationships, suffering, leadership, and the meaning of life. In the biblical tradition, wisdom literature, particularly Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, addresses practical questions of human conduct, justice, suffering, responsibility, and the relationship between God and humanity. Proverbs emphasizes the formation of character and responsible living, while Job explores suffering and human limitations, and Ecclesiastes reflects critically on the meaning and purpose of human existence. Biblical wisdom therefore provides not merely intellectual knowledge but a framework for living responsibly before God and within the community (Bauckham, 2010; Brueggemann, 2002; Crenshaw, 2010). Similarly, Rwandan indigenous wisdom has historically been transmitted through proverbs, narratives, songs, family instruction, communal practices, and the teachings of elders. Such wisdom has contributed to the formation of values such as *ubupfura*, respect, solidarity, hospitality, responsibility, and communal harmony. Anthropological studies emphasize that indigenous knowledge is embedded in cultural practices and social relationships rather than existing merely as abstract information (Descola, 2013; Kagame, 1956; Vansina, 1985).

The rationale for this study arises from the need to examine how these two wisdom traditions can enter into constructive dialogue in contemporary Rwanda. Biblical wisdom is central to Christian theological formation, while indigenous wisdom remains an important component of Rwandan cultural identity and social memory. A comparative study can therefore identify areas of convergence and difference and explore how positive indigenous values can contribute to Christian moral formation without neglecting critical theological evaluation. Such dialogue is particularly relevant in a society concerned with strengthening social cohesion, ethical leadership, intergenerational relationships, and responsible citizenship (Bediako, 1995; Bujo, 1990; Shorter, 1998). Moreover, the recognition of cultural knowledge within theological education can help students understand Christianity within their own social and historical context (Hiebert, 1985; Sanneh, 2008; Schreiter, 1985).

The problem statement is that, despite the importance of both biblical and Rwandan indigenous wisdom, their relationship has not always received sufficient systematic attention within theological education. Biblical wisdom may sometimes be studied independently from local cultural knowledge, while indigenous wisdom may be treated primarily as cultural heritage rather than as a potential resource for ethical and theological reflection. This separation can limit the possibility of developing an integrated approach to moral education and contextual theology. The present study therefore investigates the convergences, differences, and contemporary relevance of

biblical wisdom literature and Rwandan indigenous wisdom, focusing on 70 undergraduate theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda.

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods research design to examine the relationship between biblical wisdom literature and Rwandan indigenous wisdom. A mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because the study required both quantitative evidence concerning students' perceptions and qualitative interpretation of their views and experiences. The descriptive dimension enabled the researcher to present the respondents' opinions without manipulating the study environment. The approach also allowed biblical and cultural perspectives to be examined comparatively and contextually. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that mixed-methods research is useful when quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2007) emphasize the value of integrating different forms of evidence, while Cohen et al. (2018) underline the importance of selecting research methods according to the objectives and nature of the investigation.

The study population consisted of 70 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda. Because the research specifically focused on theological students who had exposure to biblical studies and Rwandan cultural perspectives, the respondents were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to obtain information from participants considered relevant to the research questions. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions generated measurable responses, while the open-ended questions enabled students to express their interpretations of biblical and indigenous wisdom in their own words. According to Etikan et al. (2016), purposive sampling is appropriate when participants are selected because of their relevance to the research objectives. Kothari (2004) also recognizes questionnaires as effective instruments for collecting standardized information, while Cohen et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of carefully designed instruments for educational and social research.

In addition to primary data, the study used documentary and biblical analysis. Relevant biblical passages, particularly Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, were examined alongside scholarly literature on biblical wisdom and Rwandan indigenous knowledge. The quantitative responses were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, allowing the researcher to summarize the views of the 70 respondents clearly. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring ideas, similarities, differences, and patterns related to wisdom, human existence, community,

cultural identity, and contemporary relevance. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a systematic approach for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data, while Bowen (2009) identifies document analysis as a valuable method for examining textual evidence. Creswell and Creswell (2018) further support the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings within mixed-methods research.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation was treated as voluntary, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and confidentiality and anonymity were respected. The collected information was used exclusively for academic purposes. The researcher also sought to represent both biblical and Rwandan indigenous perspectives fairly, avoiding unnecessary generalizations or misinterpretations. Ethical research requires respect for participants' autonomy, privacy, and dignity (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2004).

3. The Concept and Sources of Wisdom

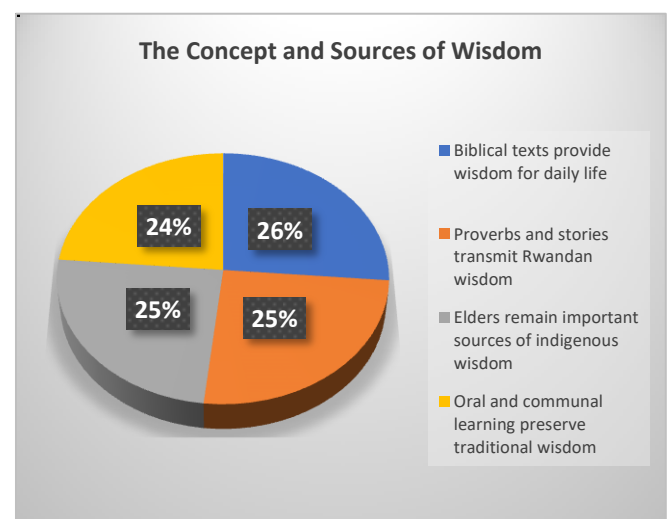
Wisdom occupies an important place in both biblical literature and Rwandan indigenous thought. In the Old Testament, wisdom is not merely intellectual knowledge but the capacity to live rightly, make sound decisions, maintain good relationships, and discern what is consistent with God's will. The Hebrew concept of *hokmâ* encompasses practical skill, moral discernment, and responsible conduct. Proverbs repeatedly presents wisdom as a way of life grounded in the "fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7), while Job explores wisdom in relation to suffering, human limitations, and divine mystery. Ecclesiastes critically examines human attempts to understand existence and concludes that genuine wisdom requires recognition of God's sovereignty. Scholars such as Crenshaw (2010), Murphy (2002), and Fox (2008) emphasize that biblical wisdom is fundamentally practical and ethical. Similarly, Westermann (1982) observes that wisdom traditions emerge from reflection on ordinary human experiences and social relationships. Thus, biblical wisdom provides guidance for everyday life while ultimately directing human beings toward God as the highest source of wisdom.

The biblical wisdom tradition is particularly represented by Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, each contributing a distinct perspective. Proverbs emphasizes moral instruction, discipline, justice, diligence, and responsible relationships. Job challenges simplistic assumptions that righteousness always produces prosperity, presenting wisdom as humility before the mystery of God. Ecclesiastes questions the permanence of human achievements and encourages a realistic understanding of life, mortality, and divine judgment. Together, these books demonstrate that wisdom includes practical knowledge, moral responsibility, reflection on suffering, and recognition of human limitations. Murphy (2002) argues that wisdom literature

teaches people how to live meaningfully within the complexities of existence, while Crenshaw (2010) stresses its educational and theological dimensions. Fox (2008) similarly identifies Proverbs as a tradition of moral formation, whereas Von Rad (1972) emphasizes the experiential character of Israelite wisdom. This broad biblical understanding provides a useful framework for comparison with Rwandan indigenous wisdom.

In Rwandan society, wisdom has traditionally been transmitted through proverbs, stories, sayings, songs, riddles, family instruction, and communal teaching. Elders have historically played an important role as custodians and transmitters of accumulated knowledge, values, customs, and social expectations. Indigenous wisdom is therefore not primarily located in written texts but is preserved through oral communication and repeated participation in community life. Vansina (1985) explains that oral traditions constitute important means through which African societies preserve historical and cultural knowledge. Kagame (1956) demonstrates the significance of Rwandan philosophical and cultural categories in understanding human existence, while Tempels (1959) highlights the importance of relational and communal dimensions in African thought. Niyonzima (2019) further emphasizes the relevance of cultural knowledge and traditional values for understanding Rwandan social identity. Through proverbs and stories, younger generations learn principles concerning respect, solidarity, hospitality, responsibility, courage, reconciliation, and appropriate conduct. Wisdom therefore functions as a practical resource for maintaining social cohesion and transmitting cultural identity.

The responses of the 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate that students recognize the importance of these different sources of wisdom. Their responses can be summarized into four major categories:



The findings indicate that 60 students (85.7%) recognize biblical texts as sources of practical wisdom, while 58 students (82.9%) identify proverbs and stories as important

means of transmitting Rwandan wisdom. Furthermore, 56 respondents (80.0%) recognize the continuing importance of elders, and 54 (77.1%) affirm the value of oral and communal learning. These results support the argument that both traditions understand wisdom as something transmitted through education, experience, relationships, and reflection. However, an important difference exists in the ultimate foundation of wisdom. Biblical wisdom explicitly identifies God as its ultimate source, whereas Rwandan indigenous wisdom is transmitted primarily through communal experience, ancestral knowledge, elders, and cultural memory. Nevertheless, both traditions emphasize practical knowledge and moral formation. Mbiti (1990), Gyekye (1996), Crenshaw (2010), and Murphy (2002) all demonstrate, from different perspectives, that wisdom traditions are closely connected with community, morality, experience, and the search for meaningful human existence.

4. Wisdom, God, and the Meaning of Human Existence

Biblical wisdom literature approaches human existence through the fundamental question of how people should live before God while facing the uncertainties of life. Rather than presenting wisdom merely as accumulated knowledge, the Old Testament connects it with discernment, moral responsibility, humility, and the search for a meaningful life. Proverbs 1:7 establishes the theological foundation by declaring that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. This principle means that genuine wisdom requires recognition of human limitations and acknowledgment of divine sovereignty. Job demonstrates that human beings cannot always understand the reasons behind suffering, while Ecclesiastes questions whether wealth, pleasure, achievement, and human knowledge can provide permanent meaning. Crenshaw (2010), Murphy (2002), and Fox (2008) emphasize that biblical wisdom engages directly with the realities and uncertainties of human existence. Von Rad (1972) further observes that Israelite wisdom developed through reflection on ordinary human experience while remaining fundamentally oriented toward God. Wisdom therefore becomes a way of understanding existence rather than simply a collection of moral instructions.

The biblical wisdom tradition views human destiny within the framework of humanity's relationship with God. Proverbs presents life as a moral journey in which choices have consequences, while Ecclesiastes repeatedly reminds readers of the inevitability of death and the limitations of human achievements. Ecclesiastes 12:13 ultimately directs human beings toward reverence for God and obedience to divine commandments. Human beings may acquire wealth, knowledge, influence, or social recognition, but these cannot provide complete control over existence. The wisdom tradition therefore encourages humility concerning the future. Seow (1997) explains that Ecclesiastes confronts the

uncertainty and temporality of human existence, while Fox (2004) emphasizes the book's critical examination of human attempts to establish permanent meaning. Crenshaw (2010) identifies mortality as a central concern within wisdom reflection, while Murphy (2002) stresses that wisdom teaches people how to live responsibly within the limitations of human existence.

Rwandan indigenous wisdom similarly places human existence within a larger spiritual and communal framework. Traditional understandings of Imana, the Supreme Being, associate human existence with a transcendent source of life and order. Human beings are not understood as completely autonomous individuals but as persons situated within relationships involving family, community, ancestors, nature, and the spiritual world. Kagame (1956) explored the philosophical dimensions of Rwandan thought and its understanding of being, while Mbiti (1990) demonstrates the importance of spirituality and community in African understandings of human existence. Gyekye (1996) emphasizes the communal dimensions of African personhood, while Tempels (1959) highlights the relational character of African conceptions of existence. Consequently, both biblical and Rwandan wisdom challenge an exclusively individualistic understanding of life, although they express their theological and cultural foundations differently.

Suffering represents one of the most difficult questions addressed by biblical wisdom. The Book of Job particularly challenges the assumption that suffering is always the direct consequence of personal wrongdoing. Job is portrayed as a righteous person who experiences profound suffering without receiving an immediate human explanation for it. The narrative ultimately directs attention toward the mystery and sovereignty of God rather than providing a simple explanation of suffering. Ecclesiastes similarly acknowledges injustice, uncertainty, death, and the apparent contradictions of human experience. These books demonstrate that wisdom does not always mean possessing complete answers; it can also mean learning to live faithfully amid uncertainty. Murphy (2002) identifies this tension as an important feature of wisdom literature, while Crenshaw (2010) emphasizes its contribution to theological reflection on suffering. Seow (1997) highlights the existential questions raised by Ecclesiastes, while Von Rad (1972) understands wisdom as a response to the complexities of human experience.

Rwandan indigenous wisdom also interprets suffering through social, moral, spiritual, and communal categories. Traditional narratives, proverbs, and community teachings have historically provided ways of interpreting hardship and encouraging perseverance, solidarity, reconciliation, and mutual support. Rather than treating suffering exclusively as an individual experience, communal wisdom encourages people to seek support and meaning within relationships.

Vansina (1985) demonstrates the importance of oral traditions in preserving collective experiences and lessons, while Kagame (1956) emphasizes the philosophical dimensions of Rwandan cultural thought. Mbiti (1990) stresses the interconnectedness of individual and community life in African thought, and Gyekye (1996) emphasizes solidarity and communal responsibility. This provides an important point of comparison with biblical wisdom: both traditions recognize that human beings encounter realities beyond their complete control and require spiritual and communal resources to confront them.

Wisdom also concerns the question of who human beings are and before whom they are accountable. Biblical wisdom presents human identity as fundamentally related to God. The fear of the Lord in Proverbs is therefore not merely an emotion but an orientation of life characterized by humility, obedience, justice, and moral discipline. The wise person recognizes that freedom carries responsibility and that human decisions affect other people and the wider community. Ecclesiastes likewise places human existence within divine judgment: "God will bring every deed into judgment" (Eccl. 12:14). Biblical wisdom consequently rejects the idea that human beings can define morality entirely according to personal preference. Brueggemann (2002) emphasizes the importance of accountability within biblical faith, while Crenshaw (2010) connects wisdom with ethical responsibility. Murphy (2002) highlights the practical moral character of wisdom, and Fox (2008) demonstrates how Proverbs forms character through instruction concerning justice, discipline, honesty, and responsible conduct.

Rwandan indigenous wisdom similarly connects identity with moral responsibility before the Supreme Being and the community. A person's identity is traditionally expressed through relationships and participation in communal life. Respect for elders, responsibility toward family, hospitality, reconciliation, honesty, and concern for community welfare are important dimensions of moral formation. Indigenous wisdom therefore evaluates a person not simply according to individual achievement but also according to the person's contribution to communal harmony. Kagame (1956) explores the relational dimensions of Rwandan philosophical categories, while Gyekye (1996) demonstrates the importance of communal values in African moral thought. Mbiti (1990) emphasizes the relational nature of African personhood, while Vansina (1985) explains how oral traditions transmit social norms and ethical expectations across generations.

The empirical findings from the 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate significant recognition of these dimensions:



The results show that 61 respondents (87.1%) believe that wisdom contributes to understanding human destiny. Furthermore, 59 students (84.3%) consider suffering an important stimulus for reflection on human existence, while 62 (88.6%) recognize the influence of spiritual identity on moral responsibility. The highest result is found in the category of community relationships, with 64 respondents (91.4%) affirming their contribution to a meaningful life. These findings indicate that students understand wisdom as a comprehensive approach to human existence involving destiny, suffering, spirituality, morality, and relationships. Crenshaw (2010), Gyekye (1996), Murphy (2002), and Mbiti (1990) similarly demonstrate the importance of moral, spiritual, and communal dimensions in wisdom traditions.

A final comparative dimension concerns the meaning of the good life. Biblical wisdom does not define a good life exclusively in terms of material prosperity. Proverbs values justice, righteousness, self-control, diligence, friendship, family relationships, and care for others. Ecclesiastes encourages gratitude for ordinary gifts such as food, work, companionship, and the opportunity to enjoy life responsibly. The biblical good life is therefore relational and ethical rather than purely material. It involves living responsibly before God and with other people. Fox (2008) demonstrates the importance of character formation in Proverbs, while Murphy (2002) emphasizes the practical orientation of wisdom. Crenshaw (2010) interprets wisdom as a tradition concerned with responsible living, while Brueggemann (2002) highlights the connection between faith, community, justice, and ethical responsibility.

Rwandan indigenous wisdom likewise associates the good life with social harmony, solidarity, respect, cooperation, and responsible participation in community life. Traditional wisdom transmitted through proverbs and narratives encourages individuals to value relationships rather than pursuing isolated self-interest. A meaningful existence is associated with contributing to family and community well-being. This creates substantial common ground with biblical wisdom, even though the theological foundations and

historical contexts are different. Gyekye (1996) argues that communal values are central to African moral philosophy, while Mbiti (1990) describes African existence as profoundly relational. Kagame (1956) provides important insights into Rwandan philosophical categories, and Vansina (1985) demonstrates how oral traditions preserve communal knowledge and values. The comparison therefore indicates that both traditions can contribute to contemporary discussions about social responsibility and human flourishing.

The findings are particularly relevant to contemporary Christian education in Rwanda. The 91.4% (64 students) who associate meaningful life with community relationships indicate that students recognize the importance of relational values. At the same time, the 88.6% (62 students) who connect spiritual identity with moral responsibility suggest that Christian formation can benefit from a dialogue between biblical and Rwandan indigenous perspectives. Such dialogue should be undertaken critically rather than assuming that the two traditions are identical. Biblical wisdom is grounded in the theological worldview of Israel and the revelation of God in Scripture, while Rwandan indigenous wisdom emerges from a distinct cultural and oral tradition. Nevertheless, both can provide resources for reflecting on human dignity, responsibility, solidarity, suffering, mortality, and the search for meaning. Gyekye (1996), Kagame (1956), Crenshaw (2010), and Pope Francis (2015) support, from different perspectives, the importance of integrating moral, cultural, spiritual, and communal dimensions in contemporary human formation.

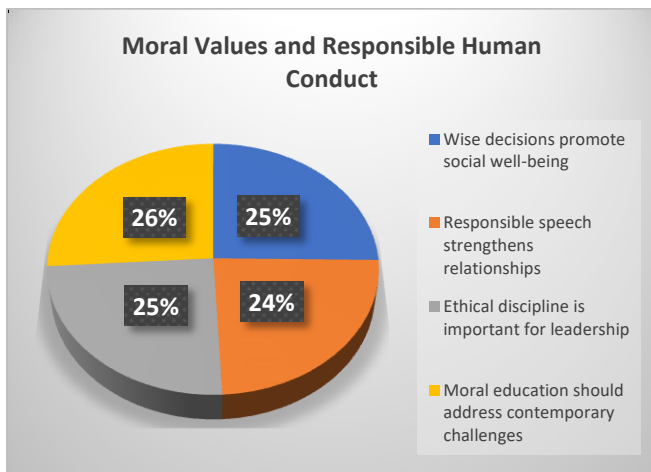
In comparative perspective, biblical wisdom and Rwandan indigenous wisdom converge in recognizing that human existence cannot be adequately understood through material achievement alone. Both traditions emphasize relationships, moral responsibility, spirituality, humility, and the search for a meaningful life. Their differences are equally important: biblical wisdom explicitly grounds ultimate wisdom in God and Scripture, whereas Rwandan indigenous wisdom has historically been transmitted through oral tradition, communal experience, elders, cultural practices, and traditional understandings of Imana. The comparison therefore should not erase their distinct identities but should promote constructive dialogue. Such dialogue can help theological education in Rwanda address contemporary questions concerning identity, mortality, social responsibility, spirituality, community life, and human flourishing. In this sense, wisdom becomes not simply knowledge about life but a way of living responsibly, meaningfully, and faithfully within relationships with God, other human beings, and the wider community.

5. Moral Values and Responsible Human Conduct

Biblical and Rwandan wisdom traditions approach human conduct through a broad concern for the quality of relationships within society. Rather than repeating the earlier emphasis on the sources of wisdom or the meaning of human existence, this section focuses on ethical formation, interpersonal behavior, social responsibility, and mechanisms for maintaining communal order. In biblical wisdom, moral maturity is demonstrated through disciplined conduct, careful speech, fairness, and the capacity to distinguish appropriate from harmful actions (Crenshaw, 2010; Fox, 2000; Sneed, 2015; Van Leeuwen, 2004). Proverbs, for example, frequently contrasts constructive and destructive patterns of behavior, showing that wisdom becomes visible through everyday choices. Similarly, Rwandan indigenous wisdom traditionally emphasized socially constructive conduct through cultural norms, oral teachings, communal expectations, and practices that encouraged people to contribute positively to family and society (Jahig, 2018; Kagame, 1956; Nyamiti, 1984; Vansina, 1985). Thus, both traditions understand morality not simply as individual behavior but as a social practice affecting the wider community.

A particularly important dimension is ethical discernment in everyday decisions. Biblical wisdom encourages individuals to consider the consequences of their actions before speaking or acting. Proverbs repeatedly presents prudent decision-making as an expression of mature character, while Job and Ecclesiastes demonstrate that human judgment is sometimes confronted by complexity, uncertainty, and circumstances that cannot easily be controlled (Crenshaw, 2010; Fox, 2004; Murphy, 2002; Sneed, 2015). Rwandan indigenous wisdom similarly valued deliberation, experience, and consultation before important decisions were made. Knowledge was not considered valuable merely because it was possessed; its importance was demonstrated through appropriate application in concrete situations. Elders and community members could therefore contribute perspectives based on experience, while younger generations learned to evaluate actions according to their consequences for others (Kagame, 1956; Nyamiti, 1984; Vansina, 1985; Tempels, 1959). This comparative perspective demonstrates that responsible conduct requires both knowledge and the capacity to apply knowledge appropriately.

The empirical responses of the 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate the perceived importance of these ethical dimensions.



The results show that 62 students (88.6%) believe that wise decisions promote social well-being, while 59 (84.3%) associate responsible speech with stronger relationships. Moreover, 61 respondents (87.1%) consider ethical discipline important for leadership, and 64 (91.4%) believe that moral education should address contemporary challenges. These findings indicate that students perceive moral wisdom as practically relevant rather than merely theoretical. This interpretation corresponds with MacIntyre's (1981) understanding of virtue as developed through practices and communities, with Taylor's (1989) emphasis on moral frameworks, and with biblical wisdom scholarship that associates wisdom with practical competence and disciplined living (Crenshaw, 2010; Fox, 2000; Sneed, 2015).

Another dimension is the formation of character through social relationships. Biblical wisdom recognizes that human beings develop moral habits within families and communities. Instruction, correction, imitation, and reflection contribute to the formation of responsible persons. The wisdom tradition therefore places importance on learning how to speak appropriately, manage conflict, exercise restraint, and respond to others with consideration (Fox, 2000; Murphy, 2002; Sneed, 2015; Van Leeuwen, 2004). In Rwandan indigenous thought, moral formation was likewise embedded within communal life. Cultural instruction transmitted expectations concerning appropriate conduct, cooperation, respect, reconciliation, and obligations toward others. Such formation was not confined to formal institutions but occurred through observation, participation, storytelling, family instruction, and community interaction (Kagame, 1956; Vansina, 1985; Nyamiti, 1984; Tempels, 1959). The comparison therefore suggests that moral education is most effective when values are embodied in relationships and daily practices.

Biblical wisdom also recognizes that human actions produce social consequences. Proverbs frequently portrays constructive conduct as contributing to stable relationships and destructive conduct as generating conflict, loss, and disorder. The concern is not merely punishment but the recognition that patterns of behavior shape the quality of

individual and communal life (Crenshaw, 2010; Fox, 2004; Murphy, 2002; Sneed, 2015). A similar principle can be identified in Rwandan indigenous moral thought, where behavior was evaluated according to its effects on family, community cohesion, and social equilibrium. Conduct that generated unnecessary conflict or damaged relationships could attract communal disapproval, while behavior contributing to cooperation and stability was positively valued (Kagame, 1956; Nyamiti, 1984; Vansina, 1985; Jahig, 2018). In both traditions, morality consequently has a strongly relational dimension.

The comparison becomes particularly significant when considering contemporary moral formation. Modern Rwandan society faces rapid social, technological, educational, and economic transformation. Young people encounter new ethical questions concerning social media, communication, leadership, consumer culture, academic integrity, and interpersonal relationships. ICT can facilitate education and communication, but it can also create new environments in which irresponsible behavior spreads rapidly. Floridi (2013) argues that digital environments create important ethical questions concerning human behavior and responsibility, while Castells (2010) demonstrates how networked communication transforms social relationships. These contemporary developments make the wisdom traditions relevant because their emphasis on discernment, responsible communication, self-discipline, and communal responsibility can provide ethical resources for navigating changing social environments. Biblical and indigenous wisdom should therefore not be treated merely as historical traditions but as resources for critical reflection on contemporary conduct.

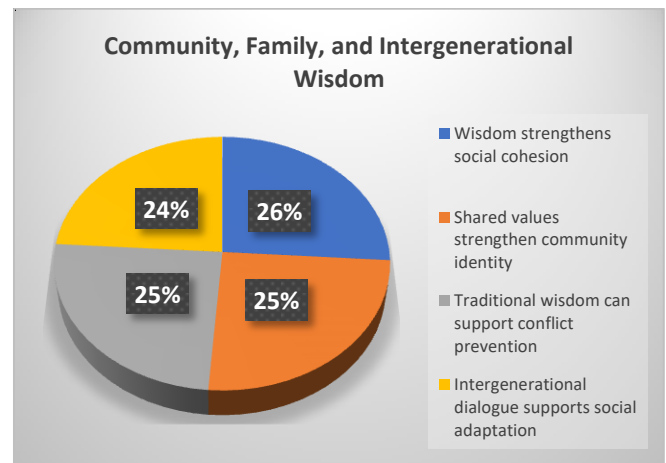
Overall, the comparative evidence suggests that biblical wisdom and Rwandan indigenous wisdom offer complementary approaches to moral formation. Biblical wisdom provides a theological and ethical framework grounded in disciplined conduct, while Rwandan indigenous wisdom contributes culturally embedded approaches to communal responsibility and social learning. Their dialogue can strengthen formation in responsible decision-making, ethical leadership, respectful communication, conflict prevention, and social responsibility. The relatively high responses among the 70 students indicate strong interest in connecting traditional wisdom with contemporary moral education. Such integration should, however, remain critical and contextual, recognizing both the enduring insights and historical limitations of each tradition. A constructive dialogue can enable theological education in Rwanda to develop morally responsible graduates capable of applying wisdom to changing social realities.

6. Community, Family, and Intergenerational Wisdom

The relationship between generations can also be examined through the social organization of knowledge and collective identity, rather than through the previously discussed themes of moral formation, elders, oral traditions, or parental instruction. Biblical wisdom literature recognizes that knowledge becomes meaningful when it contributes to the stability and continuity of a community. Proverbs frequently portrays wisdom as something that enables people to understand social relationships, respond appropriately to changing circumstances, and preserve communal order (Crenshaw, 2010; Fox, 2000; Murphy, 2002; Sneed, 2015). In this perspective, wisdom functions as a resource through which communities interpret experience and respond to new challenges. Rwandan indigenous thought similarly developed mechanisms through which communities preserved collective identity while adapting inherited knowledge to changing circumstances (Kagame, 1956; Nyamiti, 1984; Tempels, 1959; Vansina, 1985). The comparison therefore extends beyond the transmission of information to consider how wisdom contributes to continuity, adaptation, belonging, and collective identity.

A second dimension is wisdom and social cohesion. Biblical wisdom emphasizes peaceful relationships, prudent communication, reconciliation, and avoidance of behavior that unnecessarily generates conflict. Proverbs presents wisdom as a resource for maintaining harmonious relationships and building stable communities (Fox, 2004; Crenshaw, 2010; Murphy, 2002; Van Leeuwen, 2004). In Rwandan society, communal life has historically emphasized cooperation, mutual assistance, reconciliation, and the preservation of social bonds. These principles can be understood as mechanisms through which communities maintain cohesion despite differences among their members (Kagame, 1956; Nyamiti, 1984; Vansina, 1985; Shorter, 1998). Such a perspective is especially relevant in contemporary Rwanda, where strengthening social cohesion remains important for community development. Wisdom, therefore, can function as a social resource that enables individuals and communities to manage differences constructively.

The empirical responses of the 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda illustrate the perceived importance of these dimensions:



The findings indicate that 63 students (90.0%) believe wisdom strengthens social cohesion, while 61 (87.1%) consider shared values important for community identity. Furthermore, 60 respondents (85.7%) believe traditional wisdom can contribute to conflict prevention, and 58 (82.9%) recognize the value of intergenerational dialogue for social adaptation. These findings demonstrate that respondents understand wisdom as a resource for addressing contemporary social realities rather than merely preserving the past. This interpretation corresponds with MacIntyre's (1981) understanding of traditions as practices through which communities develop shared standards of reasoning, while Taylor (1989) emphasizes the importance of collective frameworks in constructing social identity. Kagame (1956) and Nyamiti (1984) likewise highlight the relational character of African understandings of human community.

A third-dimension concerns wisdom and social adaptation. Communities cannot remain socially healthy simply by repeating inherited practices; they must also determine which aspects of inherited knowledge remain meaningful under changing circumstances. Biblical wisdom itself reflects engagement with changing experiences. Job challenges simplistic explanations of suffering, while Ecclesiastes questions conventional assumptions concerning prosperity, achievement, and human control (Crenshaw, 2010; Fox, 2004; Murphy, 2002; Sneed, 2015). This demonstrates that wisdom involves critical reflection rather than mechanical preservation. Rwandan indigenous wisdom can similarly be approached as a living intellectual tradition capable of dialogue with contemporary education, Christianity, technology, and social transformation (Kagame, 1956; Vansina, 1985; Nyamiti, 1984; Shorter, 1998). The task is therefore not to reproduce every inherited practice unchanged but to identify values and insights capable of contributing to present circumstances.

A fourth dimension is wisdom and conflict prevention. Biblical wisdom repeatedly recognizes that destructive communication, uncontrolled anger, dishonesty, and reckless behavior can destabilize relationships. Wisdom encourages discernment and constructive responses to interpersonal tensions (Fox, 2000; Crenshaw, 2010; Sneed,

2015; Van Leeuwen, 2004). Rwandan cultural thought likewise contains resources for maintaining social equilibrium through dialogue, reconciliation, communal participation, and negotiated relationships (Kagame, 1956; Nyamiti, 1984; Vansina, 1985; Bujo, 1990). The finding that 60 students (85.7%) recognize traditional wisdom as relevant to conflict prevention indicates that students perceive cultural knowledge as potentially useful in contemporary peacebuilding. This is significant because wisdom traditions can complement formal institutions by shaping attitudes and social practices at the community level.

The fifth dimension concerns the relationship between wisdom and contemporary education. The university environment provides an important space where biblical scholarship, African cultural knowledge, social sciences, and contemporary disciplines can encounter one another. Wisdom education should therefore move beyond memorization toward critical interpretation and application. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes education that develops learners' capacity to respond to complex social challenges, while Castells (2010) demonstrates that contemporary societies are increasingly shaped by rapidly changing information networks. Floridi (2013) further argues that digital environments create new ethical and informational challenges. Biblical and Rwandan wisdom can contribute to this context by encouraging critical discernment concerning information, relationships, responsibility, and social participation.

Finally, the dialogue between biblical and Rwandan wisdom can strengthen cultural identity within a changing society. The finding that 61 students (87.1%) regard shared values as important for community identity suggests that students recognize the continuing relevance of cultural knowledge. However, cultural identity should not imply isolation from broader social and intellectual developments. Rather, it can provide a foundation from which communities critically engage globalization, technological change, Christianity, and contemporary education. Pope Francis (2015) stresses the importance of dialogue among cultures and communities, while Taylor (1989) emphasizes the significance of social frameworks for personal identity. Nyamiti (1984) and Kagame (1956) provide important African perspectives for understanding how communal identity is constructed through relationships and cultural meanings. A comparative study of biblical and Rwandan wisdom can therefore contribute to an educational model that values both cultural continuity and critical adaptation.

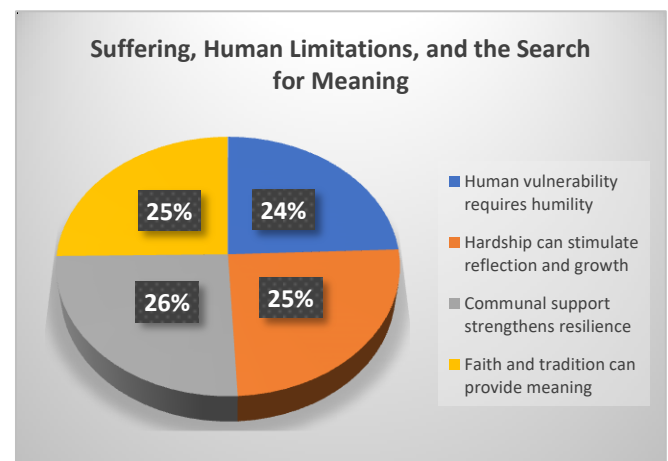
7. Suffering, Human Limitations, and the Search for Meaning

Biblical wisdom literature presents suffering as a complex dimension of human existence that cannot always be explained through simple relationships between wrongdoing

and punishment. The Book of Job challenges the assumption that suffering necessarily results from personal sin, while Ecclesiastes emphasizes uncertainty, mortality, and the limits of human control. Job's experience demonstrates that human beings may encounter circumstances whose ultimate meaning remains beyond their understanding. Crenshaw (2010) argues that wisdom literature confronts the ambiguity of human experience rather than providing simplistic explanations. Perdue (2007) similarly observes that biblical wisdom recognizes the limitations of human knowledge. Moltmann (1993) emphasizes the importance of hope in situations of human vulnerability, while Brueggemann (2001) highlights the value of honestly confronting suffering within the framework of faith. These perspectives provide an important foundation for examining how Rwandan society interprets hardship and searches for meaning.

Rwandan indigenous wisdom provides another perspective by interpreting human difficulties through relationships, communal belonging, and social restoration. Traditional understandings often emphasize that individuals exist within networks of family and community, meaning that hardship can become a concern shared by others rather than an exclusively private experience. Kagame (1976) emphasizes relational dimensions in Rwandan thought, while Vansina (1985) demonstrates how oral traditions preserve collective interpretations of historical experiences. Taylor (1992) highlights the importance of social relationships in Rwandan identity, and Mbiti (1990) broadly observes that African conceptions of personhood frequently emphasize community and belonging. This communal orientation creates possibilities for consolation, advice, reconciliation, and restoration. It also provides a point of comparison with biblical wisdom, which similarly recognizes human vulnerability while placing ultimate meaning within a relationship with God.

The responses of the 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate significant recognition of these dimensions.



The findings show that 63 students (90.0%) consider communal support important for resilience, while 62 (88.6%) believe that faith and tradition can provide meaning

during difficult circumstances. Furthermore, 61 respondents (87.1%) believe that hardship can stimulate reflection and personal growth. These results suggest that students perceive suffering not only as an experience of pain but also as an occasion for reflection, solidarity, and the search for meaning. Frankl (2006) argues that human beings can discover meaning even in difficult circumstances, while Antonovsky (1987) emphasizes the importance of developing a sense of coherence when facing adversity. Taylor (1992) demonstrates the importance of relationships in Rwandan social life, while Moltmann (1993) connects Christian hope with human experiences of vulnerability.

The first category, human vulnerability requires humility, corresponds strongly with the teachings of Ecclesiastes and Job. Ecclesiastes repeatedly reminds human beings that life cannot be completely controlled or predicted, while Job demonstrates the inadequacy of human attempts to explain every dimension of suffering. Wisdom therefore involves accepting the limits of human knowledge rather than assuming complete mastery over reality. Crenshaw (2010) explains that biblical wisdom recognizes the limitations of human understanding, while Perdue (2007) emphasizes the tension between human aspirations and the uncertainty of existence. Brueggemann (2001) argues that biblical faith allows people to express uncertainty and lament honestly, while Moltmann (1993) emphasizes humility and hope in the face of human limitation.

The second category, hardship can stimulate reflection and growth, reflects the wisdom tradition's understanding of difficult experiences as occasions for deeper questioning. Job's suffering forces him to reconsider conventional assumptions about justice, while Ecclesiastes invites reflection on the meaning and purpose of human activity. This does not mean that suffering is inherently good or that victims should simply accept it. Rather, wisdom encourages individuals and communities to seek constructive meaning while resisting simplistic explanations. Frankl (2006) stresses the importance of meaning in confronting adversity, while Crenshaw (2010) highlights reflection as an important feature of wisdom literature. Perdue (2007) emphasizes the search for meaning within uncertainty, and Kourie (2006) identifies wisdom as a transformative resource for human existence.

The third category, communal support strengthens resilience, corresponds particularly well with Rwandan indigenous thought. Difficult circumstances traditionally create opportunities for relatives and community members to provide practical, emotional, and social assistance. Community solidarity can prevent individuals from becoming isolated during periods of crisis. Kagame (1976) emphasizes the relational character of Rwandan thought, while Taylor (1992) demonstrates the importance of social relationships in Rwandan life. Vansina (1985) shows how communal memory and oral tradition preserve collective

experiences, while Mbiti (1990) emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual and community within African thought. The strong response of 63 students (90.0%) confirms that this communal dimension remains highly relevant among contemporary theology students.

The fourth category, faith and tradition can provide meaning, brings biblical and Rwandan perspectives into dialogue. Biblical wisdom ultimately directs human beings toward trust in God despite the inability to comprehend everything that happens. Rwandan indigenous wisdom, meanwhile, provides cultural frameworks through which communities interpret experience and preserve collective identity. The two traditions are not identical, but both recognize that human beings require interpretive frameworks that enable them to confront uncertainty. Pope Francis (2015) emphasizes the importance of solidarity and hope in confronting human suffering, while Moltmann (1993) places hope at the center of Christian existence. Kagame (1976) highlights the spiritual dimensions of Rwandan thought, while Taylor (1992) demonstrates how cultural meanings shape experiences of hardship.

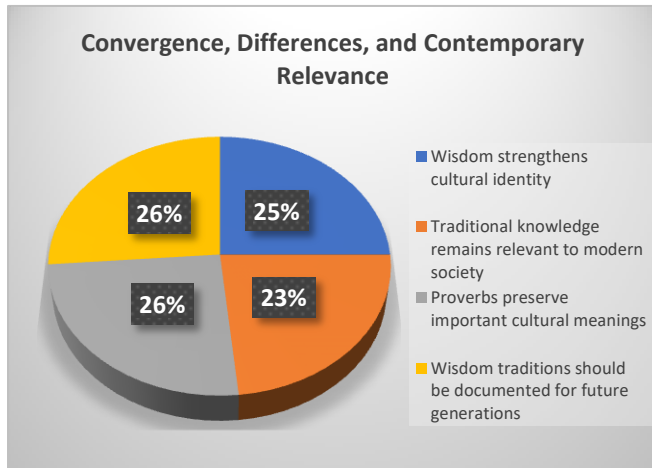
The findings therefore demonstrate that biblical wisdom and Rwandan indigenous wisdom can enter into constructive dialogue without being treated as identical traditions. Their common emphasis on humility, reflection, community, and meaning can contribute to contemporary Rwandan society, particularly in pastoral care, theological education, reconciliation, and social support. Such dialogue should remain critical, recognizing that some traditional explanations of suffering may require theological and ethical evaluation. Nevertheless, the strong responses among the students demonstrate the continuing relevance of wisdom traditions for addressing human vulnerability and strengthening resilience in contemporary Rwanda.

8. Convergence, Differences, and Contemporary Relevance

The comparative study of biblical wisdom literature and Rwandan indigenous wisdom reveals that the two traditions can be examined through new dimensions such as language, cultural memory, identity, adaptability, and knowledge preservation rather than repeating earlier discussions of morality, leadership, reconciliation, or environmental responsibility. Biblical wisdom was preserved through written texts, poetic reflection, sayings, and theological interpretation, while Rwandan wisdom was historically transmitted predominantly through oral forms, including proverbs, narratives, riddles, and symbolic expressions. Crenshaw (2010) explains that wisdom literature preserves accumulated reflection on human experience, while Perdue (2007) emphasizes its capacity to interpret changing circumstances. Vansina (1985) demonstrates the importance of oral transmission in African societies, and Kagame (1976) highlights the intellectual significance of Rwandan

linguistic and philosophical categories. The comparison therefore provides an opportunity to examine how societies preserve, reinterpret, and transmit knowledge across historical change.

The responses of the 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate the perceived contemporary value of these knowledge systems.



The results show that 65 students (92.9%) believe wisdom traditions should be documented for future generations, while 63 (90.0%) consider proverbs important for preserving cultural meanings. Furthermore, 62 respondents (88.6%) associate wisdom with cultural identity. These findings suggest that biblical and indigenous wisdom should be approached not merely as collections of old teachings but as knowledge systems capable of shaping identity and interpreting contemporary experience. Vansina (1985) emphasizes the historical importance of oral transmission, while Kagame (1976) demonstrates the intellectual depth of Rwandan cultural categories. UNESCO (2021) stresses the importance of preserving cultural knowledge through education, while Mbiti (1990) identifies memory and tradition as important dimensions of African religious and cultural life.

A first new dimension is language as a carrier of wisdom. Proverbs and wise sayings often contain meanings that cannot be completely reproduced through direct translation because their significance is embedded in particular linguistic and cultural contexts. Biblical wisdom similarly uses poetry, metaphor, parallelism, symbolism, and figurative language to communicate complex ideas. Proverbs 10–31, Job, and Ecclesiastes demonstrate how literary form contributes to the communication of wisdom. Crenshaw (2010) emphasizes the literary character of biblical wisdom, while Perdue (2007) notes that wisdom texts employ diverse genres to communicate reflection on human existence. Kagame (1976) demonstrates the philosophical importance of language in Rwandan thought, while Vansina (1985) shows how oral forms preserve cultural meanings. Consequently, studying wisdom requires

attention not only to its content but also to the language and forms through which knowledge is communicated.

A second dimension concerns cultural memory and historical identity. Wisdom traditions preserve accumulated experiences and allow communities to interpret their past while addressing present circumstances. Biblical wisdom texts emerged from particular historical experiences but continued to be interpreted by later generations. Similarly, Rwandan proverbs, narratives, and oral traditions have preserved knowledge about social relationships, human behavior, historical experiences, and cultural identity. Assmann (2011) argues that cultural memory enables communities to maintain continuity across generations, while Vansina (1985) emphasizes oral tradition as a means of preserving collective knowledge. Kagame (1976) demonstrates the importance of historical and philosophical memory in Rwandan thought, while Taylor (1992) illustrates how cultural meanings influence Rwandan understandings of identity and social life. The preservation of wisdom is therefore also a means of preserving collective memory and cultural continuity.

A third dimension is the relationship between wisdom and cultural identity in a changing society. Modernization, urbanization, globalization, formal education, and digital communication have changed how younger generations acquire knowledge. The finding that 58 students (82.9%) consider traditional knowledge relevant to modern society indicates that indigenous wisdom has not necessarily lost its value. However, its continued relevance depends on its ability to engage contemporary questions without losing its cultural foundations. Mbiti (1990) emphasizes the continuing significance of African religious thought, while Descola (2013) demonstrates that cultural relationships with the world change over time. UNESCO (2021) advocates educational approaches that connect cultural knowledge with contemporary learning, while Hilty and Aebischer (2015) show how digital technologies can facilitate knowledge preservation and dissemination. Digital archives, online databases, educational platforms, and audiovisual documentation could therefore provide new mechanisms for preserving Rwandan wisdom.

Another important dimension is critical adaptability. Wisdom traditions survive when communities distinguish between principles that remain valuable and practices that may no longer be appropriate in changing social circumstances. Biblical wisdom itself demonstrates processes of reinterpretation, because wisdom traditions contain different perspectives on prosperity, suffering, justice, knowledge, and human limitations. Perdue (2007) emphasizes the diversity and development of biblical wisdom traditions, while Crenshaw (2010) notes their internal tensions and debates. Similarly, Rwandan indigenous wisdom should not be treated as a fixed or homogeneous system. Taylor (1992) demonstrates that

Rwandan cultural practices have changed over time, while Descola (2013) emphasizes the dynamic character of cultural relationships with the world. A comparative approach should therefore promote critical continuity rather than uncritical preservation.

The finding that 62 students (88.6%) associate wisdom with cultural identity also demonstrates the importance of wisdom for identity formation among young Rwandans. Students who understand their cultural intellectual heritage may develop greater confidence in engaging contemporary knowledge while maintaining awareness of their historical roots. This does not require rejecting modern scientific or technological knowledge. Rather, it encourages dialogue between different forms of knowledge. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes culturally responsive education, while Mbiti (1990) highlights the significance of African cultural identity. Kagame (1976) provides a philosophical foundation for understanding Rwandan intellectual heritage, while Assmann (2011) explains how cultural memory contributes to collective identity.

The study also highlights the importance of documentation and knowledge preservation. The fact that 65 students (92.9%) support documenting wisdom traditions demonstrates strong recognition of the danger of losing oral knowledge. Proverbs, narratives, songs, riddles, and other forms of indigenous expression can disappear when they are no longer systematically transmitted. Vansina (1985) emphasizes the importance of recording oral traditions before they disappear, while UNESCO (2021) advocates the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Hilty and Aebischer (2015) demonstrate the potential of ICT for preserving and disseminating knowledge, while Assmann (2011) emphasizes the role of memory institutions in maintaining cultural continuity. Universities, churches, libraries, cultural institutions, and researchers could therefore collaborate to create digital repositories of Rwandan wisdom.

Finally, the comparison has implications for theological scholarship and curriculum development. Biblical wisdom should not be studied in isolation from the cultural contexts in which theology is practiced. Introducing Rwandan wisdom into theological education can help students develop contextual approaches to Scripture while critically examining indigenous concepts in light of Christian theology. Such an approach can strengthen African theological scholarship without reducing biblical theology to cultural categories. Shorter (1998) emphasizes the importance of cultural engagement in theological reflection, while Bediako (1995) argues for the significance of African cultural resources in Christian theology. Crenshaw (2010) provides a framework for understanding biblical wisdom, while Kagame (1976) offers resources for engaging Rwandan philosophical thought.

In conclusion, the contemporary relevance of biblical and Rwandan wisdom can be explored through language, cultural memory, identity, adaptability, documentation, and contextual theological education. The findings demonstrate strong student support for preserving and reinterpreting these traditions. A constructive comparative approach should neither romanticize indigenous wisdom nor isolate biblical wisdom from African cultural realities. Instead, it should encourage critical dialogue that preserves valuable knowledge while enabling it to respond to the intellectual and cultural challenges of contemporary Rwanda.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study, “Biblical Wisdom Literature and Rwandan Indigenous Wisdom: A Comparative Study,” examined the relationship between biblical wisdom traditions and Rwandan indigenous wisdom, with particular attention to their relevance for contemporary Rwandan society. The study established that wisdom in both traditions constitutes a valuable source of knowledge for interpreting human experience, guiding conduct, strengthening relationships, and transmitting important cultural and spiritual values. The findings from the 70 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda indicate that a significant majority recognize meaningful connections between biblical and Rwandan indigenous wisdom. The results therefore support the hypothesis that, despite differences in historical, cultural, and theological contexts, both traditions contain values that can contribute to contemporary moral and social formation. At the same time, the comparative analysis demonstrates that these traditions should not be considered identical. Biblical wisdom is grounded in Israel’s relationship with God and biblical revelation, whereas Rwandan indigenous wisdom developed through communal experience, oral traditions, cultural practices, and historical transmission.

The study recommends that the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Rwanda strengthen comparative studies of biblical and indigenous wisdom within theological, philosophical, and pastoral education. Positive elements of Rwandan indigenous wisdom should be integrated into Christian formation, catechesis, preaching, pastoral counselling, and community education, while practices or beliefs inconsistent with Christian theology and human dignity should be critically examined. Churches and Christian communities should encourage intergenerational transmission of valuable cultural knowledge through proverbs, storytelling, songs, cultural activities, and educational programmes. Universities and researchers should systematically document Rwandan indigenous wisdom so that important oral knowledge is preserved for future generations. Particular attention should be given to young people by developing programmes that connect biblical wisdom with positive cultural heritage, ethical reflection, critical thinking, and contemporary social

challenges. Finally, collaboration among theological institutions, churches, cultural institutions, schools, and local communities should be strengthened to explore how wisdom traditions can contribute to responsible leadership, social cohesion, cultural identity, pastoral ministry, and sustainable community development. Further research should involve broader populations and investigate the practical application of these wisdom traditions in contemporary Rwandan life.

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