

# The Care of the Self

By Teodros Kiros

## Introduction

My concern with the cultural disease of decadence and its possible overcoming by cultural transformation will be delivered in a yearlong project in ten articles. Once my readers engage these articles, I will incorporate their responses into the body of the articles.

I invite my readers to participate in this civic discourse, honestly, critically and civilly. Let us do this for our historic homeland, the birthplace of human kind.

Aristotle, the great Athenian thinker once remarked that virtue is nothing more than the activity of the soul in accordance with excellence, or at least, not without it.

The two key terms in that remark are Virtue and Soul. Virtue and Soul are not foreign to classical Ethiopian moral imagination; they are only becoming increasingly common to contemporary Ethiopian cultural life and thereby causing the prevalence of cultural decadence, as I argued recently in “Cultural Decadence” (*Abugida, Ethioquest, Ethiopian Review, Ethiosun, Addis Voice, Ethioguardian, Quatero, Teoclahagos*, Jan 14,2011).

Infact our historic Christian sensibilities preach the relevance of virtue and soul. Unfortunately, the message has not been internalized. The message is pushed by the churches but ordinary Ethiopians have not made the practice a living part of their everydaylives, and this is a serious problem, which needs to be solved.

The first step of cultural transformation is the moral organization of the self.

The care of the self demands that the individual attends to her soul by developing an internal relationship between self and self, and not self and the church. The latter relationship is remote and external to the soul. The soul must be activated from the inside and the relationship between self and self is internal to the soul. The activity of the soul is a conversation that the self enters into privately, as a conversation between the creator and the lost soul, or the soul, which wishes to become virtuous, become good. The internal parts of the soul, which must be activated, are reason, the desires and spiritedness. These three are the engine of the soul. Should we want to be good we must cultivate the relationships between these three parts in accordance with the foundational principle of conversing with our creator.

Consider the following example. Two Ethiopians are having a passionate conversation about the ongoing discussion of forgiveness for the imprisoned derg leaders. One is

opposed the other is giving it a considered reflection. Both are consulting their souls and trying to think wisely. Reason is guiding the discussion but the desire to revenge and the spirited disposition are at war with one another. What should these concerned Ethiopians do? At this stage I will only introduce the problem, and in the next article, I will propose a solution, and argue that a conversation with our Lord may provide an answer.

Conversation with the creator is a private matter, central to the care of the self, a point that I will address in my next article on the care of the self.