

# Corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa: A practical-theological response

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On the 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, 89.6% of Sub-Saharan African countries received scores below 50, where a score of zero signifies that the country is highly corrupt and a score of 100 declares a country free of corruption. From these results, it seems as if Sub-Saharan African countries are quite vulnerable to corruption. In this article, the question whether certain traits in the Sub-Saharan African culture such as communalism, gift giving and a shame culture could in some situations influence people's perception of, and their possible openness towards, certain forms of corruption was investigated. The research showed that cultural traits do influence people's behaviour and that there are certain traits in the Sub-Saharan African culture that might sanction corruption. In response to these findings, some preliminary suggestions were proposed as to how Christians living in Africa could evaluate their cultural practices in the light of God's Word and from a reformed theological paradigm. Instead of succumbing to the pressure posed by their culture to participate in immoral or corrupt activities, they could contribute to a moral regeneration on the African continent.

**Kulturele perspektiewe op korrupsie in Afrikalande suid van die Sahara: 'n Prakties-teologiese respons.** Volgens *Transparency International* se 2012-*Corruption Perceptions Index* het 89.6% van Afrikalande suid van die Sahara 'n telling van minder as 50 gekry, waar 'n telling van nul op hoë korrupsie dui en 'n telling van 100 aandui dat 'n land vry van korrupsie is. Hieruit blyk dat hierdie lande kwesbaar is vir korrupsie. In hierdie artikel word die moontlikheid ondersoek dat daar sekere eienskappe in die kultuur van hierdie lande is wat mense se persepsie van, en moontlike deelname aan, sekere vorme van korrupsie kan beïnvloed. Aandag word aan aspekte soos kommunalisme, die gee van geskenke en 'n 'skandekultuur' gegee. Die navorsing toon dat kultuur wel mense se gedrag beïnvloed en dat daar sekere eienskappe in die kultuur van Afrikalande suid van die Sahara is wat korrupsie kan versterk. Op grond van hierdie bevindinge word 'n paar voorlopige voorstelle gemaak oor hoe Christene wat in Afrika woon aspekte van hulle kultuur in die lig van God se Woord en vanuit 'n gereformeerde teologiese paradigma kan evalueer. In plaas daarvan om toe te gee aan die druk van hulle kultuur om aan immorele of korrupte aktiwiteite deel te neem, kan Christene tot 'n morele herlewing op die Afrika-kontinent bydra.

## Introduction

Transparency International (TI) regularly publishes their Corruption Perceptions Index. Their 2012 index (TI. 2012) covers 176 countries globally and reports on perceived levels of public sector corruption. The results are given on a scale of 0–100, where zero indicates high perceived levels of corruption, and 100 indicates that the public sector is perceived to be free of corruption. It is shocking to notice that two-thirds of the countries received a score below 50 in the 2012 Index. This indicates that the world has a serious problem with corruption. What is even more alarming is that 89.6% of the Sub-Saharan African countries fall in this group.

In this article, Vorster's definition of corruption, namely that 'corruption is the misuse of a public office or a position of authority for private material or social gain at the expense of other people' has been used (Vorster 2011:1). When one looks at the work of Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999a:8), it is apparent that they understand corruption in a similar way. They describe it as the combination of positions of public office with positions of accumulation. According to them, it had always been a trait of the mercantilist trade system, which was at its peak in Africa from 1930 to 1980. It was common in colonial regimes, in nationalist movements and in postcolonial states. At certain times in history, it also emerged in Western Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Corruption is thus by no means unique to the African continent, and one cannot assume that societies and political systems of Sub-Saharan Africa are more corrupt than, for example China, India, Russia, Italy or France (Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999b:xvi). Newspaper

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headings such as 'Corruption is a major threat to the rise of Brics' (Qobo 2012b:15), 'Graft in Italy is worse than it has ever been' (Qobo 2012a:14) and 'Frankryk se leiers klink soos Mafia' [France's leaders sound like Mafia] (Scholtz 2011:12) illustrate the point undeniably.

In South Africa, there are positive signs of efforts by the government and the judicial system to act against corruption. The office of South Africa's Public Protector, for example came into being on the 1st of October 1995 with the aim to *inter alia* 'strengthen the constitutional democracy by investigating and redressing improper and prejudicial conduct, maladministration and abuse of power in state affairs' (Public Protector South Africa 2013).

Since 2009 Advocate Thuli Madonsela has been the Public Protector. She does not hesitate to take on some of the country's most influential figures such as the expelled ANC Youth League president, Julius Malema and the ex-police commissioner Bheki Cele (Corruption Watch 2013). In 2003, Toni Yengeni, the chief whip of the South African parliament, received a four-year jail sentence for corruption (Phillips 2003). In August 2010, the police commissioner Jackie Selebi was sent to jail for corruption and his 15-year sentence was upheld a year later by the Supreme Court of Appeal (Anon. 2011).

This fight against corruption is an ongoing process. Just recently, the Minister of Public Service and Administration announced the launch of an anti-corruption bureau to address corruption in the public service. At the same time, the police commissioner announced that an internal anti-corruption unit was to be established to fight corruption in the South African Police Service (Anon. 2013).

In spite of these positive initiatives, South Africa's score on the TI Index (2012) is 43, joining other Sub-Saharan African countries with extremely high levels of corruption. The question can be asked why this is the case. Allan, Mattes and Millie (2002:vii-viii) and Kroukamp (2006:206) observe that people often assume that traditional African cultural values may facilitate corruption. They base their assumption on two reasons. Firstly, most African states follow a neo-patrimonial<sup>1</sup> system where no clear separation exists between officials' private interests and public responsibilities (cf. Erdmann & Engel 2006:18). It is thus culturally quite acceptable to receive gifts and payments for services

1. Max Weber used the concept *patrimonial authority* to describe the politics in postcolonial Africa. In patrimonial political systems, the ruler ensures political survival by distributing material benefits to followers, namely the ruler's 'clients'. The authority is completely personalised; it is not rational-legal; the public sphere is not clearly distinguished from the private sphere; and written laws and bureaucratic institutions do not protect the citizens. Weber's definition of patrimonialism does not adequately characterise current political systems. Some nations in the developing world, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa, follow a modified form of the patrimonial rule. Political scientists refer to neo-patrimonialism. It is a hybrid political system in which the customs of patrimonialism co-exist with rational-legal or bureaucratic institutions. The right to rule in neo-patrimonial regimes is still being ascribed to a person rather than an office, despite the official existence of a written constitution. The 'big man', often a president for life, dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws. Relationships of loyalty and dependence permeate a formal political and administrative system. Officials occupy bureaucratic positions more to acquire personal wealth than to perform public service. The 'big man' and his inner circle undermine the effectiveness of the state administration by using it for patronage and clientelism in order to remain in power (Bratton & De Walle 1998).

rendered. Secondly, African governments are characterised by extensive patron-client networks. Grinker, Lubkemann & Steiner (2010:590) discuss Jean-François Bayart's point of view on the neo-patrimonial forms of national governance in postcolonial Africa and the influence it has on the occurrence of corruption. Bayart (2010:641) refers to the African way of politics as 'politics of the belly'. Its main characteristic is the importance of patronage networks in order to establish and maintain political power. Leaders have to cultivate personal social networks and they do it by using public power and resources. The state is 'criminalised', as leaders are under a lot of pressure to use their power to gain access to resources in order to redistribute it to their subordinates.

However, not all of the resources go to other people, because leaders need to look after their own interests too. According to Bayart (discussed by Grinker *et al.* 2010:590), the 'big men' face two major challenges in gaining and maintaining political power. These two challenges are the driving forces of the neo-patrimonial political systems in Africa. The first is to cultivate followers. Leaders do this by gaining access to public resources in order to redistribute them through their private patronage networks. The second is to maintain control over the resources by anticipating and preventing potential opponents within their own and rival factions. In this new political culture, the state plays a vital role, as it provides the resources to be in government. Bayart's expression, 'politics of the belly', conveys the message that it is of utmost importance that the leaders capture the resources of the state to have the means to 'nourish' their personal social networks in order to stay in power.

The role political systems play in the occurrence of corruption cannot be denied, but in this article I would like to investigate the observation of Allan *et al.* (2002:vii-viii) and Kroukamp (2006:206) that some traditional African cultural values may facilitate corruption. The research question is whether the Sub-Saharan African culture contains certain traits that influence people's perception of, and their consequent participation in, corruption. The methodology of Osmer (2008:4) will be followed. It consists of four tasks of which each one is associated with a specific question to guide the practical-theological interpretation: the descriptive task (what is happening?), the interpretive task (why is it happening?), the normative task (what should happen?) and the pragmatic task (how can we make it happen?). The first, second and third tasks will be performed simultaneously. The focus will be on the concept of culture and whether it is possible to talk of Sub-Saharan African culture in general will be investigated.

Before looking at some cultural traits and their possible role as sanctioning agents for corruption, the possibility to use the reformed theological paradigm to evaluate cultural aspects in the Sub-Saharan African context will be explored. During the pragmatic task, some preliminary suggestions on how individuals can overcome the potential problematic effects of these cultural influences will be offered.

## Culture and Sub-Saharan African culture?

According to Geertz (quoted by Carson 2008:2), 'the cultural concept denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols' and this 'system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form' helps people to 'communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about life and attitudes towards it'.

I would like to remark on two aspects of Geertz' definition. The phrases *historically transmitted* and *inherited conceptions* emphasise the point that culture is a construct handed over from one generation to another. The ancestors' understanding of concepts plays a significant role in what is been transmitted. Secondly, the phrases *communicate and perpetuate* and *life and attitudes towards it* show the fundamental importance of culture in the art of living. L'etang's study (2011:16) confirms this statement. Various definitions of culture reveal recurring themes such as 'the total way of life of a group'; 'the social legacy individuals acquire from their group'; 'a set of standardised orientations to recurrent problems'; and 'learned behaviour'. The article further shows that members of the community integrate behavioural patterns and mental constructions into their culture. They then share these meanings amongst themselves by means of specialised language and symbols. L'etang (2011:16) accentuates the words of Max Weber: 'Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself spins and these webs comprise culture.'

One of the biggest impediments in a study of culture is that a universal culture does not exist. From the discussion above on culture, it is evident that culture is the phenomenon that distinguishes groups from each other, as each group has its own characteristic way of life (MacCloud & Carrier 2010:12). Neither does 'a homogeneous African or a Sub-Saharan African culture' exist. Draper (2006:176) argues that it is incorrect to speak of a generic *Africanness* because of the vastness of the continent and the diversity in language, culture and geography. I agree with Bull and Newell (2003:246) that a study of various African cultures will undoubtedly ensure better results, but such a mammoth task is outside the scope of this article. Edoho (quoted in Gannon & Pillai 2010:553) states that, despite the cultural diversity 'certain indigenous trends of thought, cultural influence and value orientation are commonly shared by the majority of people in Africa'. This is particularly the case for Sub-Saharan Africa (Gannon & Pillai *ibid*:553). Wangila (2010:326–327) also believes that conquests, migration and trade have provided many opportunities for cultural contact and have enabled the identification of distinguishing features and fundamental commonalities despite the different social African contexts (cf. Banze 1998:25). Another danger when working with and evaluating culture, Carson (2008:73) warns, is that the observer cannot free himself or herself from their own cultural background and values.

In view of Edoho, Wangila and Banze' opinions, I will tread lightly in an attempt to make a general analysis of Sub-Saharan

African culture, whilst paying heed to Carson's warning to guard against potential subjectivity. In the research, I came across authors who write about African culture in general such as Mbiti (1990) and Grinker *et al.* (2010), whilst others refer to specific African countries such as Allan *et al.* (2002) and Blundo and De Sardan (2006). Use is been made of both kinds of literature. Extensive use is also been made of the work of B.J. van der Walt, a prominent and well-respected South African philosopher. Van der Walt comes from a reformed background and has a comprehensive knowledge of Africa.

The question can rightly been asked whether it is fair to use the European reformed theological paradigm to evaluate cultural aspects in the Sub-Saharan African context. This question is the focus of the next paragraphs.

## Reformed theological paradigm for the Sub-Saharan African context?

In the 80s, when apartheid was rife in South Africa, Boesak (1981:13–14), a prominent Coloured church leader and fierce critic of government, wrote how millions of Black people experience political oppression, economic exploitation, unbridled capitalism, social discrimination and the disregard of human dignity as the fruit of the European reformed tradition. In those apartheid times, Black reformed South Africans had to answer to themselves whether the reformed theology is a burden to be cast off as soon as possible, or whether it is an instrument towards the renewal of the church and society. In his argument, Boesak shows how the reformed tradition had been misused for nationalistic propaganda and to serve a political ideology. One of the principles of the reformed theology, *sola Scriptura*, is that the Word of God is supreme (cf. Vorster 2010:432). It may, however, not be manipulated to suit a particular culture or ideology or to justify oppression and inhumanity as it happened during the era of apartheid. On the contrary, the Bible reveals God's will regarding the whole existence of being human, including the spiritual, political, economic and social wellbeing of people. The Bible makes people accountable to principles such as justice, love and peace.

A second principle of the reformed theology, *solus Christus*, refers to the lordship of Jesus Christ (Boesak 1981:14–15; cf. Vorster 2010:432). Abraham Kuyper's idea that every inch of this life falls under the lordship of Christ, corresponds with the African concept of the wholeness of life. There is no room for dualism; Christians are not supposed to withdraw from the world, but are responsible for their world and the transformation of that which is wrong. Christians need to address issues such as caring for the poor, protection of the weak, suppression of evil, punishment of the oppressor and just distribution of wealth, power, privileges and responsibilities. Per definition, this is what reformed theology is all about – a public theology, directed towards the renewal of society by bringing about much needed socio-political transformation (Calvin 1949; Smit 2007; Vorster *ibid*:429, 431). According to Boesak (*ibid*:16–17), Black Christians who are following the reformed tradition, need not to be ashamed of

this tradition, but should cling to the lordship of Jesus Christ and the supremacy of the Word of God. They should live as God's people in this world, they should seek liberation from oppressive systems and they should pursue peace, justice and human dignity for all.

To conclude: it is possible to use the reformed theological paradigm to evaluate cultural aspects in the Sub-Saharan African<sup>2</sup> context.

## Some Sub-Saharan African cultural traits and their possible influence on corruption

According to the TI's Corruption Perceptions Index (TI 2012), it seems as if Sub-Saharan African countries are quite vulnerable to corruption. The notion under investigation in this article is whether Sub-Saharan African culture contains traits that cause people to be more susceptible to corruption. According to Bauer (2000:219), people's values and norms greatly determine corruption. Tradition-bound South African public officials, for example, may feel that they are entitled to receive gifts for the work they did, whilst their colleagues from other cultural backgrounds might consider such behaviour as bribery. These differences illustrate what Dassah (2008:45) calls 'cultural relativism'. People from different cultures do not perceive behaviour uniformly. Wangila (2010:326) concurs with Dassah when she says that notions of right and wrong differ throughout the world, depending in which culture one finds oneself. Johnston (2005:18), Hussein (2005:95), Blundo and De Sardan (2006:70) agree that cultural norms and practices may contribute to the problem of corruption. It is thus necessary to look at some Sub-Saharan African cultural traits and to evaluate their possible impact on the prevalence of corruption.

### Communalism, tribalism and the importance of relationships

Jensen and Gaie (2010:297) state that the communal notion of the self is considered by many as the cardinal point of the African worldview. Nyasani (2013) agrees that sociality is one of the distinctive characteristics of African philosophy. He quotes African authors such as Leopold Senghor and Sekou Toure, who argue that African societies are in effect 'community societies' where the individual is less important than the group, and solidarity in the group is more important than the needs of the individual. Mutual concern is fundamental to the African way of life. Individuals never think of themselves as standing alone, but always as part of the tribe (Banze 1998:115). The Oxford Dictionary of English (2012) describes communalism as the 'allegiance to one's own ethnic group rather than to the wider society'. The traditional African saying 'I am because we are' transmits the message that being part of a community helps the individual to be fully human.

2.Smit (2011:315) states that two-thirds of reformed Christians live in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He also mentions that one finds many reformed churches in West, Central and Southern Africa (Sub-Saharan Africa).

The term *ubuntu* carries the same message, namely that a person is a person through other persons (Gade 2011:303). The well-known African scholar, John Mbiti (1990:2) says that to be human is to belong to the community. He continues by saying that it is in the group that a person becomes aware of his or her existence. It is in a group that people experience care, honour and acceptance (Van Rooy 1999:250; Hussein 2005:95; Van der Walt 2006:21, 163, 170). African communalism contributed to social order, integrity, an all-encompassing humanity and a fullness of life (Okonkwo 2010:96). Although Nyasani (2013) is not blind for the possible negative effects of communalism, for example that the individual might not take responsibility for his or her actions, he stresses the point that it has kept generations of Africans in a state of unity and mutual dependence – something that is, according to him, 'humanistically healthy'.

Van der Walt (2003:406) argues that communalism could make African societies prone to corruption. He provides two reasons for his argument. Firstly, communalism causes the distinction between private and public funds to become vague. Secondly, communalism puts people under enormous financial pressure. People are responsible to take care of their immediate and extended family. Dassah (2008:46–47) agrees with Van der Walt that pressure exerted by the extended family system, might cause people to engage in acts of corruption in order to meet their obligations.

The social moral code 'requires' of people to render 'services' and 'counter-services'. This practice often gives rise to favouritism, nepotism, tribalism and economic corruption (cf. Adeyemo 1997; O'Donovan 2000:11; Hussein 2005:95). In the South African context, for example, participants at a workshop in 1997 acknowledged that some senior Black officials are under pressure to appoint 'struggle-comrades' in jobs, regardless of their skills or qualifications. A study done in Benin, Niger and Senegal by Blundo and De Sardan (2006:9, 12) shows that corruption is often tolerated, because it is legitimised by social practices such as favours, string-pulling, professional protectionism and nepotism, especially when family, neighbours and friends are involved. Grobler and Joubert (2004:94) contend that, although nepotism is unethical, African cabinets and public offices are often filled with members of the presidents' tribes to ensure the perpetuation of their power base. It is difficult to deny the role of culture in ethnic ties and the possible influence it has on corruption (Lodge 2002:419–420).

As a social being, one's relationships with other people and especially one's family are important for one's wellbeing, but these relations should not cause immoral or corrupt behaviour in order to meet social and other cultural obligations. Fear of people should not determine one's actions and decisions. Solomon says that the 'fear of man will prove to be a snare' (Pr 29:25). Furthermore, the Ivorian scholar Pohor (2006:316) acknowledges the right of tribal members to expect protection by the tribe and the responsibility to work together and to share resources, but rejects racism and tribalism, because it reduces individual responsibility and individual worth.

## Spiritual worldview

Adeyemo (1997), O'Donovan (2000:21), Van der Walt (2006:163, 212–213) and Turaki (2011) mention that African people have a *spiritual* worldview. The spiritual world and the ancestors play an integral role in their lives. Every visible event has a spiritual cause. Since the spiritual world is so unpredictable, many people live in fear and they try to manipulate the spiritual world by means of rituals. Africans are not so much interested to know the *What?* and the *How?* of an event, but they want to know *Who?* incited the action and *Why?* it happened (cf. Van Rooy 1999:239–242). In order to appease the ancestors, to avoid suspicion from others and to ensure favourable relationships with all members of the community, the individual is under financial pressure. The spiritual worldview also provides a handy escape mechanism for unethical behaviour, as spiritual forces, active in the happenings of this world, may be blamed for a person's actions (Van der Walt 2003:46).

The reality of fear in Africa is understandable, but it should not be the driving force in one's life or an excuse for immoral actions. The apostle John writes that there is 'no fear in love' (1 Jn 4:18) and Paul adds that 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Cor 3:17).

## Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa

In the traditional African society, one acquires leadership through mystical powers, military might, inheritance or wealth. Leadership positions are usually for life with no opposition parties (Adeyemo 1997; cf. O'Donovan 2000:21). As seen earlier, clientelism plays a vital role in the lives of political leaders. In order to survive politically, leaders need to extract resources and redistribute part of it to their political clientele. President Mugabe illustrated this by seizing farms from white owners for himself and senior Zanu-PF members (Thornycroft & Berger 2009:1). The followers of the African leaders judge their leaders by their status and possessions. Therefore, gift giving and flamboyant lifestyles are important (Blundo & De Sardan 2006:25–26). A 'man of honour' is one who is able to amass and redistribute wealth. Material prosperity is hence one of the chief political virtues. A leader might even discredit a political opponent by describing him or her as somebody who 'does not own anything, not even a bicycle'. To possess a fortune is characteristic of true leaders and shows that they are at one with the cosmic forces (Bayart 2010:641). In order to keep up this kind of lifestyle, African leaders need strategies to accumulate the necessary funds.

As long as a leader's honour and status depend on visible fortune, it will be very difficult to fight corruption (Blundo & De Sardan 2006:25–26; Van der Walt 2006:160, 180). African leaders, as leaders worldwide, need to secure their leadership position by good governance and by being exemplary leaders.

## Gift giving

Interdependence plays a considerable role in a communalistic culture. Van der Walt (2006:180) explains, 'I give something

to you so that one day you will give something to me.' It is quite acceptable to give gifts to somebody in a high position with the expectation that he or she will later return the favour. Gifts also form part of everyday social life. Gifts may include taxi money for visitors, contributions to funerals and weddings as well as health care. Through gifts, people 'maintain their ranks' and demonstrate good manners and generosity. Furthermore, if a person does not accept a 'gift', the giver may be offended (Blundo & De Sardan 2006:98–99).

As giving and receiving gifts are ways to build personal relationships and to express gratitude, people may deem the payment of officials to do their work in the same light (Blundo & De Sardan 2006:98). The culture of gift giving has changed from gifts being given *after* rendering service to gifts being given as a condition *for* rendering service (Dassah 2008:45).

I agree with Van der Walt (2003:401–403) that, as soon as the aim of a gift is to create an unjust advantage to distort justice or to create expectations, it may facilitate corruption. Moses makes it very clear when he warns, 'Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous' (Ex 23:8; cf. Ecc 7:7). It was good to hear that S'bu Ndebele, the former KwaZulu-Natal premier and the Minister of Transport, voluntarily returned the top-of-the-range Mercedes Benz he received as a gift from a businessman who benefited from the program by the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government. He did this despite of President Zuma's advice that he is entitled to keep it. He said that he 'had 15 fairly good years in government and the only thing he really has is his good name' (Anon. 2009).

## 'Shame culture'

According to Van der Walt (2006:158–159, 165–180), the African conscience differs from the conscience of the developed world. The latter is been described as 'guilt-orientated', because it is linked to the transgression of norms that people from a specific society consider as binding. As long as people belong to such a society and live according to their internalised norms, they have a good conscience. If they have done something wrong, they feel guilty, even if nobody knows about the offence. On the other hand, the African type of conscience is been called a 'shame-orientated' conscience – a description that is linked to honour and status in the community. If somebody has stolen, the theft causes no problem to the thief until it is been discovered. The offender is afraid that the discovery of the theft might lead to rejection. The biggest fear is the fear of rejection, because it is extremely important to belong to the group. The offender will only experience shame once the offence is in the open. It often happens that the person, instead of withdrawing, retaliates with great anger in an attempt to save face in the community.

In a shame culture, whistle-blowers are often seen as 'more guilty' than the thief, because they have endangered the honour of the thief. It appears as if the truth is less important than good relationships, just as friendliness and acceptance

are more important than honesty. In order to protect the honour of the other person, one should handle the truth 'cautiously'. Africans perceive this way of handling the truth as self-controlled, thoughtful, wise and very useful to survive the difficult social networks of a communalistic community. The offender will not be held accountable directly and definitely not in front of others. African people will administer discipline in an indirect way by using proverbs and other symbolic actions.

To acknowledge guilt, implies disgracing oneself; hence, offenders will try to hide offences as long as possible. If it is no longer possible, they will use mediators to make offences public and to negotiate reconciliation. In the shame culture, it is extremely difficult to offer forgiveness, as the harmed person is indirectly saying that the offender is a bad person. It is just as difficult to accept forgiveness, as the offender then acknowledges that the other person is 'better' than him or her. As the process of reconciliation is so arduous, it is often easier to cover up offences or ignore it.

This is contrary to the biblical way of handling transgressions. The message of the Bible is to confess transgressions. In Psalm 32:3 and 5, David says that when he kept silent, his bones wasted away, but when he confessed his transgressions to the Lord, he was forgiven. James' advice correlates with David's experience when he says, 'confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed' (Ja 5:16).

## Morality

Values such as harmony, generosity, friendliness, hospitality, respect and loyalty aim at the welfare of others and the community. The decision whether an act is right or wrong, depends on the rules of the community. An act is wrong if it is committed against the *group*. Killing an outsider is therefore not wrong. As long as mismanagement and embezzlement benefit the group, it is fine (Van der Walt 2003:218–223; Turaki 2011). It is rare to find a single system of rules in Africa. The official rules often differ from the 'real' ones that are based on traditions (Blundo & De Sardan 2006:96).

Corruption, mismanagement and embezzlement will never be overcome as long as the decision whether something is right or wrong depends on the rules of the community or on judging whether the community will benefit from it or not (Van der Walt 2003:48, 223). From a biblical perspective, there is no place for normative pluralism. The Bible gives clear instructions on the right way to live (cf. Rom 12:9–21).

## Urbanisation

Africa has experienced massive urbanisation. Mbiti (1990:2, 219) refers to the effect it has on the lives of individuals. They become detached from their traditional environment, resulting in a moving away from the 'we' of the traditional corporate life to the 'I' of modern individualism. O'Donovan (2000:12–14) and Van der Walt (2011:5) are of the opinion that

some people readily accept the developed world's culture and values and lose their sense of responsibility to look after each other. They move away from being community-centred to ego-centred people and materialism and secularism become part of their lives (cf. Bayart 1999:34). According to Kroukamp (2006:211), a culture of dishonesty and greed, with little consideration for ethical norms, is developing in Africa. The growing desire to fulfil selfish motives, the lack of professional integrity, the inability to live within regular earnings and the need to meet the demands of high lifestyles, might contribute to the increase in corruption as people seek ways to make ends meet (Kyambalesa 2006:109).

## Suggestions for Christians living in a Sub-Saharan African cultural context

From the above discussion, it is clear that some aspects of the Sub-Saharan African culture may facilitate corruption. Some suggestions will now be offered to Christians as how they could evaluate their cultural practices in the light of God's Word and from a reformed theological paradigm. Instead of succumbing to the pressure posed by their culture to participate in immoral or corrupt activities, they could contribute to a moral regeneration on the African continent. I agree with Deputy President Motlanthe of South Africa when he says that the fight against corruption does not only depend on the laws of the country, but also on the individual's sense of right and wrong (Modjadji 2011:10). The decision and consequent behaviour of the Minister of Transport regarding the car as a gift, serve as a good example.

## Cultural heritage and biblical guidelines

Wangila (2010:326) mentions that people sometimes find that their cultural traditions or some aspects of it, are in conflict with notions of social justice. I agree with O'Donovan (2000:15) that, for Christians, the Word of God should be the normative guideline and not 'notions of social justice'. From the reformed tradition, with *sola Scriptura* as one of its pillars, the Word of God is more than just a normative guideline – it transforms hearts and minds (Ezk 36:26–27; Rm 12:2). Christians should thus not simply pursue their cultural heritage, but interact critically with it in order to discover where cultural norms are in conflict with the biblical guidelines for everyday living. Turaki (1991:170), a well-known Nigerian theologian, speaks of a 'regenerated mind, a changed attitude and a cultivated moral character'. Then people will live according to internalised convictions and not according to fear (cf. spiritual worldview). Acts of embezzlement, discrimination, nepotism, tribalism stemming from unleashed individualism, greed and materialism can then be countered by acts promoting social justice (Turaki *ibid*:174). Once people have decided to obey the instructions of Jesus Christ to 'love your neighbour' and 'do to others what you would like them to do to you', reliability, integrity and loyalty will become part of their way of life (Van der Walt 2003:411–412).

## Principles of *Ubuntu* and *Koinonia*

*Ubuntu* conveys the idea of 'humanness'; 'good moral disposition'; 'sympathy in joy and in sorrow'; 'generosity'; 'a feeling of human wellbeing'; and 'a capacity of social self-sacrifice on behalf of others' (Gade 2011:307–308). These virtues are in sharp contrast with the prevailing spirit of ego-centeredness; materialism, greed, dishonesty and a lack of professional integrity. I agree with Mabovula's opinion (2011:38–39) that the deterioration of Africa's social fabric and the weakness of public morality can be countered by retrieving and practising the communal cultural values of *ubuntu* such as care, humbleness, hospitality, tolerance, humanity and respect.

These values are in correspondence with the principle of *koinonia* in the New Testament. In the passage of Acts 2:42, one reads about the early Christian communities. They were devoted to fellowship, serving one another and sharing their goods (Kisau 2006:1303–1304). *Koinonia* does not only imply the unity within the community, but requires that this unity becomes visible through actions of community participation and generosity (Okonkwo 2010:95). *Koinonia* has an effect on one's way of living. Characteristics of a changed life are encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness and compassion (Phil 2:1; Abate 2006:1442). Other people, says Lillie (2008:62–63), are able to witness this transformation because of a meeting with Christ (Acts 4:13). It has far-reaching consequences, including to stand up against that which is wrong (Acts 5:29).

## Communomy versus theonomy

The community is the basis of traditional African morality. By combining the words *communitas* and *nomos*, Van der Walt (2003:233–234) coined the term *communomy*. The developed world's morality has its origin in the individual and the word *autonomy* comes from *autos* and *nomos*. In both cases, morality originates in the human being, whilst the Bible makes it clear that man cannot be his own law. God has given clear guidelines to experience the fullness of life. It is possible when one takes his laws as the origin for moral norms, hence Van der Walt's term *theonomy* from *theos* and *nomos*. Kyambalesa (2006:117) believes that an acute sense of morals and self-respect, rooted in one's belief in God, can enable an individual to overcome the temptation of engaging in corrupt practices.

A word closely linked with morality is *freedom*. People often think that freedom means *freedom from* God and moral constraints. They visualise a *freedom toward* doing your own thing and self-centredness. For the Christian, however, *freedom* means *freedom from* self-centredness and *freedom toward* living a life reflecting the image of God, a life transformed by his grace and according to his will (Carson 2008:138).

## Conclusion

In this article, the focus was on the possible role culture plays in the endorsement of corruption. Aspects like the importance

of relationships, communalism, fear, leadership styles and gift giving put people under tremendous financial pressure. Furthermore, people have become more individualistic and materialistic. It is been believed that Christians living in Africa do not need to succumb to temptations posed by their culture to participate in corrupt activities. Suggestions have been made from a reformed point of view how people could evaluate their cultural practices, follow the good and transform the bad. They could follow the virtues of *ubuntu*, virtues directed at the wellbeing of others, instead of indulging in self-centeredness and greed. Instead of being directed by *communomy*, they can live according to *theonomy* – a life transformed by God and contributing to the moral regeneration on the African continent.

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