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# The leadership crisis in Africa

Approaching it from a worldview perspective

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## Abstract

*In many parts and many respects Africa can still be called a bleeding continent. Many writers have identified weak and bad leadership as one of the root causes for the African malaise. While different writers have explained the crisis in leadership from political, economic, social and other perspectives, in this article (and the rest of the series) the author provides an explanation from a broader worldview perspective.*

*The present contribution serves as an introduction or prolegomena to what will follow in the series by providing background information on inter alia the following: (1) The different past and present leadership traditions in Africa. (2) The three major worldview influences on leadership on the Sub-Saharan continent, viz. the traditional African, Western and Christian. (3) An intermezzo on the author's long-standing interest in and research about the African situation. (4) The different reactions of African leaders to colonial and post-colonial influence. (5) Since what a white, Western-oriented person writes on the leadership crisis in Africa may today in South Africa be misunderstood – and he himself even be called bad names – the author then explains in detail his own approach in dealing with multi-worldview and multi-cultural differences, different from the revivalists, propagating a renaissance of the traditional African worldview, and also the relativism of Western post-modernists. (6) Finally, four basic contours of the traditional African worldview are discussed as preparation for the next contribution that will provide*

*concrete examples, also from our present South African situation, of how these characteristics of the traditional African worldview still influence leadership on the continent.*

## 1. A personal introduction: Africa, a bleeding continent

Starting to write this essay, I again remembered the moving “Prayer for Africa” by Rev. Mavuminsa Makanza at the beginning of the proceedings of PACLA, the (first) Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly, held in Nairobi, December 9-19, 1976 (cf. Cassidy & Verlinden, 1978:1). It started with the following cries:

Today, Lord, this Africa of ours is bleeding – its ideas and thoughts are bleeding, its knowledge is bleeding, its prayers are bleeding, its theology is bleeding, its servants are bleeding. And Africa will bleed even more if you are not with her ... Africa is ignorant ... Africa is hungry ... Africa is thirsty ... Africa has been blind ... Africa is weak ... You are the Way, you are the Truth, you are the Life.

In 1979 followed the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA) in Pretoria. And from the beginning of the eighties I visited and lectured in about fifteen African countries and started crying like Makanza about our continent, lamenting also about what was happening because of apartheid in my own country.

My impression then was that PACLA I, SACLA and also PACLA II (1994) was strongly influenced by an individualist, pietist, evangelical kind of Christianity, strong in prayer, and spirituality, but not enough concerned about structural problems in Africa and their worldview or ideological foundations.

When one today listens (on e.g. YouTube) to some of the motivational speeches of important Christian Africans (with grand titles like reverend, doctor and professor) my personal observation is confirmed. The lamentable situation of most countries on our continent is often described to *external* factors. And the only solution for Christians is to pray and hope for better days. Very little or no attention is given to the possible *internal, normative direction* of the traditional African worldview and its *structural implications* which also needs to be evaluated from an integral Christian perspective.

## **1.1 The causes**

As a Christian I also firmly believe in the power of prayer and worship. But is that our only responsibility? We may not shift our own responsibilities unto God's intervention only. I continued asking myself up to today: Why all the poverty, sickness, and other kinds of suffering on my own continent? Like Adeyemo (1997), one may even ask: Is Africa cursed?

Nearly daily in South Africa newspapers, the TV and other electronic media as well as books announce new examples of corruption among political, economic and even religious leaders. But mostly the ordinary citizen, overwhelmed by these reports, neither asks nor knows what the underlying reasons are for such conduct. The aim of this reconnaissance is therefore to uncover the deeper worldview presuppositions for such degenerate behaviour.

At the second PACLA meeting of 20-30 November 1994 again in Nairobi I got hold of the valuable little book of Kinoti (1994) which began to help me to understand some of the reasons for Africa's many miseries. Prof. Kinoti's careful and honest description and assessment of the African situation goes far beyond of all the PACLA-meeting's deliberations, attended by about 500 Christians from nearly every African country. He does not merely discuss the symptoms of the African "disease" but also honestly and clearly analyses its causes.

## **1.2 Failed Leadership a root cause of Africa's malaise**

Speaking about a crisis usually means that a problem persists for some time and seems to be very difficult to solve.

When I write about the crisis of leadership in Africa the word "crisis" can be used in two different ways, a quantitative and a qualitative. The first draws attention to the need for more leaders, for example for more church leaders to serve the rapidly growing number of Christians. The second, qualitatively used meaning focuses on, for example, unqualified, inexperienced, weak and failed corrupt leadership. While "crisis" here will be primarily understood in the second sense, it also implies the first meaning.

Already thirty-five years ago (only about two decades after Nigeria's independence) the well-known author of *Things fall apart*, Chinua Achebe, wrote the following:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land and climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of setting a personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership (Achebe, 1983:1).

He then bemoans the terrible corruption amongst Nigeria's leaders instead of transforming the lives of the millions of the poor. Billions were stolen, squandered, embezzled and consumed, for example on the salaries of a grossly overstuffed and unproductive public service. He concludes his introduction by saying: "We have lost the twentieth century; are we bent on seeing that our children also lose the twenty-first? God forbids!" (p. 3).

Will we soon be able to say about South Africa what Achebe wrote about his own country?

Nigeria is not a great country. It is one of the most disorderly countries in the world. It is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun ... It is one of the most expensive countries ... It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar. In short, it is among the most unpleasant places on earth! (pp. 9-10).

Like Achebe one after the other African writers identifies weak, failed and corrupt leadership as one of the main reasons for the African malaise. Recently again, after listing the many problems of the continent, Ilo wrote:

These stem from the fact that people in leadership positions have become the greatest enemies of their people through corruption, excessive authoritarianism, a stubborn hold to power, and a lack of openness to consensus building (Ilo, 2012:25).

In this book on Christian leadership another African, Mambula (2006), refers to the situation in Israel at the time of Jeremiah (5:1 ff.) with the comment that nothing has changed since then. In Africa up to today we hear the cry everywhere "Give us real leaders, not misleaders!"

Leadership, bad leadership, is one of the root causes of the other ills of Africa because it affects a whole nation. Adeyemo correctly wrote:

Leadership is the measure of any nation, institution and organisation. If the people in leadership are intellectually and morally bankrupt and moribund, chances are that the nation, institution and organisation will be unprogressive and backward. ... What is at stake over leadership is high. That is why some have said that leadership is everything. Nations rise and fall depending on the calibre of their leaders (Adeyemo, 2009:v).

What Kinoti wrote already 24 years ago is today still a fact in many African countries:

Africa desperately needs a new type of leaders. Experience ... shows that changing from one political party to another or from military rule into civilian clothes does not change the nature and motives of African leaders (Kinoti, 1994:31).

How does he envisage the different kinds of leaders? His answer is: "Men and women of integrity, ability and education who have a genuine concern for and commitment to the wellbeing of all their fellow citizens".

## **2. Different leadership traditions in Africa**

To start it is important to be aware of different leadership traditions on the continent. Mazrui & Tidy (1984:193) already mentioned the following: (1) the paternalistic elder tradition, the leader as the father that should take care of everyone; (2) the sage tradition of the leader as ultimate teacher; (3) the warrior tradition of liberation fighters and military rulers; (4) the charismatic, inspiring leader; (5) the sacred leader, representative of the ancestors and (6) the rich monarchical ruler or divine kingship.

These six leadership traditions (there may be more) may of course overlap in a combination of more than one style. All of them are the result of a worldview combined with socio-economic-political situations.

It should also be kept in mind that Mazrui and Tidy categorised the types of political leadership. However, because of the importance of politics in post-independent Africa, leaders in other positions, even in churches, emulated these political models of leading.

Important for this study is the fact that these different leadership styles are clear reflections of one or more of the characteristics of the traditional African worldview (see section 9.1 below). The leader as the father of everyone (1) is a reflection of communalism (number 4), the leader as warrior an indication of power-consciousness (no. 3), while the leader as the divine representative of the ancestors indicates the traditional worldview belief in the spirit world (no. 2 under section 6.1 below).

It seems as if one of the most common traditions, also after the independence of the African countries, was the idea that the leader should be the father of

his people, caring for their every need. As will be indicated in the next article this has important implications for how political leaders ruled the state, also in South Africa.

These traditions, on the one hand, reveal the megalomania or delusions about their own grandeur of some African leaders. On the other hand, it indicates how much – too much? – Africans tend to expect from their leaders. Often, they do not realise that even great and good leaders are not superhuman beings but fallible humans, often with feet of clay.

### **3. Three major worldview influences on leadership**

It is a common viewpoint in, for example, the Western world to see many present problems on our continent, like economic deprivation, abuse of power, instability, political corruption, ethnic conflict together with the attendant suffering, as peculiar to or typical of Africa and especially African leaders. But should some African leaders be blamed more than some leaders of for example America, Europe or China? It will to my mind be a too superficial and one-sided understanding of the African situation, since it does not consider the particular history of the continent, its inherited colonial socio-political structures, the whole context in which African leaders had and still have to operate. Also, the underlying, interacting worldviews are mostly ignored.

Broadly speaking, leaving out the influence of Islam in large parts of Africa (cf. Turaki, 2010a and 2010b), the traditional African worldview, the modern Western and a spiritualist, dualistic Christianity shaped Africans' view on life and also leadership. I will deal with each of the three in detail. Finally, I will provide an exposition of a more integral worldview perspective on leadership. But as intermezzo first a personal detour.

### **4. Intermezzo: Personal interest in African worldviews, culture and leadership**

Educated in philosophy and theology I was acquainted with many secular Western worldviews. Since my student years I have been interested in an integral Christian worldview. From about 1970 (when I taught at the University of Fort Hare and was involved in missionary work) I also developed an interest in African worldviews.

At Potchefstroom I published a number of books on the differences and relationships between African and Western worldviews and cultures as well as the different ideologies adopted by African countries after gaining independence ((cf. Van der Walt, 1976, 1988a, 1988b, 1991:205-220 (summarised in 2001:85), culminating in 1994 and continued in 1997, 2003a, 2006a and 2008)). The issue of leadership also greatly interested me (Van der Walt, 1995, 2003b and 2006b).

Some academics and other leaders outside South Africa read these books, commented on them and in this way a fruitful interchange was established. When travelling through Africa from the 80's I regularly enlarged my own library with books, including some at that time still banned in South Africa. (At a personal interview in 1987 with Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, then state president of Zambia, I even received three of his autographed books.)

Apart from my contacts with South African Christian leaders, like Archbishop Desmond Tutu (who wrote a preface to my book of 2003a and to who's worldview I devoted two articles, Van der Walt, 2003c and 2003d), I want to mention especially my long-standing contact since the eighties with two sincere Nigerian Christian thinkers and friends, Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo (cf. Van der Walt, 2011), who has already passed away, and a long-standing colleague, Prof. Yusufu Turaki, from whom I could learn much about the larger African world outside my own country. As African Christians, while respecting their own culture, those two leaders were also courageous to admit that one's own worldview and culture can never be the final norm for life and leadership. It has to be transformed in the light of God's revelation.

## **5. Supported by a letter from an eminent African**

Especially after independence from Western colonialism Africans often hailed their own traditional worldview and culture uncritically as without any blemish (see section 6 below). But there were exceptions like the late Dr. Kofi Anane-Fenin who passed away recently (18/08/2018) at the age of eighty.

In my archives I still have a long (4 page) letter to me (dated 08/04/1997), handwritten on a letterhead of the Department of Physics, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. (At the time Kofi had already been appointed Secretary-General of the United Nations.)

His letter was in response to my book *Afrocentric or Eurocentric* (of 1997). It may be worthwhile to quote here from at least the last two pages of this

honest letter. He first compared Africa with some Asian countries at the end of the previous century: He wrote:

Both regions emerged from colonialism at about the same time and faced many of the same obstacles. In 1957, when Ghana gained independence from Britain, it was one of the brightest hopes of Africa with a higher gross national product than South Korea, which was itself still recovering from a destructive war, and before that, from 35 years as a Japanese colony. Today South Korea is recognized as one of Asia's 'dragons', an economic powerhouse expanding its new markets throughout the region and the world. Ghana, meanwhile, has slid backward. Its gross national product today is lower than it was at independence ... its economy is propped up by foreign aid. It is an ugly truth, but it needs to be laid out here, because for too long now Africa's failings have been hidden behind a veil of excuses and apologies.

Dr. Kofi Anane-Fenin concluded his letter by writing about Africans in leadership positions:

One of the things I find most frustrating about Africa is the unwillingness of some of the most seasoned academics and African 'experts' to give an honest, cold-hearted, unsentimental assessment of the continent and its problems. Africans must now or never, start the process, the process of re-examination, by taking a cold hard look at ourselves. We must begin by looking at our own maddening propensity to accept all kinds of suffering while waiting for some outside deliverance.

Also, other writers often compare Africa's continuing "backwardness" with the development or modernisation of Eastern countries like Japan. Davidson (1993:40), however, also draws attention to important differences between the two regions:

... Japan had not been invaded and subjected to the imposition of a totally external culture. Japan had remained independent. Standing on this independence, Japan had been able to look to the West and gradually take from the West whatever might be useful, rejecting what was not useful. Modernization, in other words, did not have to mean alienation.

Also, Jahn (1961:12) mentions Japan as an example of people who could appreciate modern technology and modern forms of organisation without abandoning their traditional culture, indicating that modernity can be assimilated by a non-European culture without destroying it.

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## 6. Reactions in post-dependent Africa

Davidson (1993) and Khapoya (1994) in various parts of their books describe the rich history, culture and institutions in existence in many African countries already in ancient, pre-colonial times for which the European colonisers often had little respect. According to Western ideas Africans were regarded as primitive, uncivilised peoples.

Even after the independence of most African colonies (during the sixties of the previous century) they had to accept the Western idea of a nation-state. Europe provided the model which Africans only had to copy. Europe knew better than Africa itself what was good for her.

### 6.1 *Two reactions*

Basically, Africans reacted in two different ways. Some wanted to become Westernised, however, called by Frantz Fanon “black skins with white masks”. Other groups aspired for the revival of their traditional African heritage of which they were deprived. But both according to my research reactions finally proved to be failures.

The first because one may *offer* your own worldview and culture to someone else, but never *force* it. The result will be a hybrid culture and the double identity (divided soul) of the recipient.

The second option of looking back during a crisis of transition could also not succeed since the past can never be fully revived to inspire the present. Nevertheless, this had been an understandable and common reaction in many African countries directly after their independence. In different ways (like the negritude movement, cf. Jahn, 1961:205 ff), they strived for a reawakening or renaissance of traditional beliefs, worldviews, cultures and leadership styles.

### 6.2 *Euphoria in South Africa as an example*

In 1998, four years after South Africa’s first democratic election (in 1994), a conference was held in Johannesburg on the African Renaissance, the then pet topic of the deputy president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki (cf. Makgoba, 1999). Most of the papers delivered were rather uncritical and full of euphoria about what a revived African identity entails and how it can ensure a rebirth of the traditional African heritage.

However, nowhere in the large volume of proceedings (447 pages) published afterwards the problem of leadership featured, while the only author who gave an evaluation of the African situation, by looking into the mirror and preventing the African Renaissance from becoming a fruitless exercise in intellectual romantic idealism, was the one by Khoza (Makgoba, 1999:279 ff.).

Following Kofi Anane's advice of having a cold, hard look at oneself he wrote:

Africa's problems are by large of our own making. It does not help to externalize them and blame something else. We are a sick continent and we are largely to blame for it. We are affected by war, famine, pestilence, incompetence, corruption, disease, crime and a declining standard of life (p. 281).

The same lack of attention to problems connected with leadership in Africa is again evident in Mbeki's many speeches on the African renaissance (cf. Mbeki, 1998) and how does South Africa look like twenty years after his enthusiastic announcement of a coming African Renaissance?

Every one of us should be deeply worried about the corruption among government officials, bank and even state capture and daily service protest strikes all over the country. Economically we have already been accorded junk status. Are we entering a time of total chaos and anarchy?

## **7. A common basic weakness**

As already mentioned, one of the reasons why it is difficult to get a grasp on leadership ideas in Africa is the fact that, even if we leave out the possible influence of the Islamic worldview in parts of Africa, leadership reveals a very complex mixture of at least the following worldview influences: (1) Elements of surviving traditional African communalist beliefs and worldviews at the basis. (2) A sometimes only superficial Christian coating which confines serving the God of the Bible to the "spiritual" realm of the church with no relevance to everyday life like work, money, politics and "secular" leadership. (3) The influence of Western secular individualism in which God and his ordinances for life and leadership are ignored.

But, as will become evident, in spite of the differences between these three major worldview influences on leadership, they share a common defect: they reject divine norms originating outside and above human behaviour.

In traditional Africa the final norms for the conduct of a leader are laid down by die community and the ancestors of the group. In spiritualised Christianity

divine norms are only applicable in the so-called supernatural or sacred sphere of life. For centuries already, the secular West has proclaimed the autonomy of the human rational being, implying that man is a law unto himself, replacing God as Giver of the directions for life. The implications of the three worldviews are, as will be indicated in the following essays, that not only the normative direction (how leadership should be conducted) but also its structure (what it is constituted of) have become obscured.

## **8. Important remarks about the approach to be taken in this contribution**

What I am going to write may, especially at present in my own country, be regarded as too controversial and not fashionable or acceptable as politically correct. To draw attention to weak worldview and cultural traits or simply to compare different worldviews and their cultures, as will be done, may today even be branded as (white) racism.

My own viewpoint is that, on the one hand, one should distinguish between the race or colour of a person – the way s/he was born and could do nothing about – and her/his worldview and resulting culture. It is therefore wrong to blame a person of racism simply because he/she is from a different culture than your own or dares to write something critical about your own.

On the other hand, it is not possible to totally separate race and culture. It is a fact that people of different colours through the ages developed quite different worldviews and cultures. We have to accept that we live in a multi-racial as well as multi-cultural and multi-religious country in South Africa.

Therefore, not to offer an apology or excuse for what I will be writing, but only to prevent forehand misunderstandings, I have to make the following important preliminary remarks about how I will cautiously but honestly approach this complex and often controversial issue. What I have to say will also be based on the many voices of writers *about* but especially *from* Africa.

### **8.1 Possible from many perspectives**

The crisis of leadership can be approached from various angles, like a political, economic, social, psychological and more perspectives. Other important aspects are then often neglected. One is the historical. As said, often Africa is today blamed for its incompetent leadership without any knowledge about its past history from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times (Cf. e.g. Davidson, 1985 and 1993.)

## **8.2 *The important influence of the traditional African worldview***

A second remark, closely connected to the first one, is that many writers analyse the present socio-political-economic situation but do not really grasp the deeper underlying worldvise causes of our situation. For instance, Kretzschmar (2014) in her otherwise excellent article looks at leadership from a moral perspective without indicating what the worldview reasons are for the often immoral and corrupt conduct of leaders in the work place. Western writers on Africa should remember the following words of Adeyemo (2009:18): “Knowingly or unknowingly 21<sup>st</sup> century Africans are yoked to the traditional African worldview in their mindset ... not all the elements of this worldview are bad, nor are all good”.

Nyirongo (1997 and 1999) and Turaki (in various publications of 1997, 1999, 2006 and 2010b) also agree that many of Africa’s problems are deeply traditional and cultural. Turaki, for instance, concludes one of his latest books by writing even about African Christians:

Many Africans who have become Christians still have their traditional umbilical cords uncut. They are simply Christo-pagans. Their traditional morality and ethics have not been fully renewed and transformed by biblical teachings. They are still in bondage to sin and to spirit powers, which separates them from their Maker. Their embrace of traditional morality also leads to communal and social sins that go against the biblical command to do justice and love mercy (Turaki, 2011:186).

The main sins discussed by Turaki are: self-centredness and pride, greed and lust, anxiety and fear.

## **8.3 *The two sides of every culture***

My third remark is even more important. By drawing attention to some weak aspects of traditional African worldview and culture in the following articles does not mean that I reject everything it entails. I have always said and written that every culture in the world – that of the West included – may reveal both good, weak and even bad traits (cf. e.g. Van der Walt, 2006a:1-17).

Neither am I suggesting that because of their traditional worldview every African is bound to be a weak or even bad leader. But as Christians we nevertheless have to face squarely and honestly the weak traits because of their detrimental influence on leadership. Christian leaders should be sensitive to but not uncritical of the different worldviews and cultural contexts of other people and especially of their own.

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Sometimes it is not easy to decide whether a specific cultural trait has to be evaluated positively or negatively. Some traits may in some situations be beneficial but in different contexts and times may change and may hold less good. The strong communal or *ubuntu* character of the traditional African worldview and culture may serve as an illustration. In original rural and agricultural African societies, it promoted caring and sharing in times of scarcity and need. Today, many Africans have to struggle for survival in a dominant urban and monetary environment and tend to become more individualistic and self-centred. De Visser (2001:184) indicates that in large-scale urban societies the individual becomes more important than the group was in more small-scale, traditional societies.

#### **8.4 Two approaches**

Confronted with such complexity two different approaches already mentioned above are possible. Like Wilhelm (1998:111) one could try to discover, appreciate and re-appropriate the good traditional African values and practices but also try to blend them with Western and biblical viewpoints about leadership.

Although this approach may look very positive, Wilhelm to my mind, is far too uncritical about the possible negative effects of traditional African, Western and even some Christian worldviews and cultures on leadership. The result of his attempted blend or synthesis between them and a Biblical perspective may therefore remain superficial and not a lasting solution for the crisis in leadership.

I have therefore adopted another, more critical approach. By mainly focussing on what is wrong in traditional Africa, the West and even certain types of Christianity may of course give the impression of me being too negative. But when dealing with a crisis one first has to look for its causes, make a diagnosis of its reasons, before proposing a therapy or possible solution. In a world where we still live with a mixture of both the bad and the good, what is not good cannot be ignored when striving for something better. (For other recent writers who want to improve leadership in Africa from a thetic-critical perspective cf. Janvier & Thaba, 2008 and Priest & Barine, 2017.)

My approach is not exceptional or only typical of a Christian perspective. When the prominent African secular-humanist thinker, Gyekye (1997:232 ff.) discusses the attitudes of Africans towards their cultural past he also adopts the position that every culture contains good or strong and bad or weak features. He therefore rejects on the one hand the nostalgic revivalists'

viewpoint of the acceptance of the entire cultural past of a people. On the other hand, he also does not agree with the position of the anti-revivalists, rejecting the past in its entirety.

### ***8.5 The postmodern approach also unacceptable***

As a Christian I also cannot accept the contemporary Western postmodern relativist approach when dealing with worldviews and cultures. And again, I am not a lonely voice. Allow me the following quotes from the African scholar, Sanneh (1993:236):

Strict cultural neutrality, assuming it is possible, cannot by itself promote equality or harmony between cultures. On the contrary, if all cultures are equal, so that anything and everything we find in one culture we can find in another, then alienation and discord between cultures, what we have identified as serial ethnocentrism, are the only results we can expect. Absolute equality creates absolute hostility, since any sign of cross-cultural interest must be read as proof of unwanted interference, one culture sticking its nose into another culture, thus violating the rule of cultural autonomy.

Sanneh continues:

In a condition of absolute cultural equality, total ignorance of each other would turn out to be a blissful virtue preferred to knowledge and informed interest in each other's affairs, and ignorance is fertile ground for caricature.

In to my own experience worldview and cultural encounter stimulates comparison, demands and effects self-knowledge and makes one more conscious about the weaknesses and strengths of your own worldview and culture.

### ***8.6 Sources consulted***

As said, what I have to write here may be viewed, especially at the moment in my own country, too controversial and biased and therefore ignored. For this reason, I will bolster what is written by referring readers mainly to the publications of black African leaders and academics who enjoy authority.

Previously, I have written on the impact of the traditional African religion, worldview and culture on development in Africa (Van der Walt, 1999), an issue closely related to leadership. I then quoted from different black African writers (e.g. Kimuyu, Dembetembe, Dia, Nyang and Etounga-Manguelle, not mentioned here) who indicated how certain aspects of the traditional African view of life may hamper different kinds of development (Van der Walt, 2008).

Some of the publications to be consulted in this series are already dating back three decades after most African countries had gained independence. But they enabled me to draw *some possible parallels* between what then happened elsewhere on the continent and the present South African situation, twenty-five years after 1994 and especially during the last ten years. In looking for possible similar developments in the past in the rest of Africa and South Africa today I am of course not suggesting that exactly the same is happening or even should happen in my country.

### **8.7 A limited but valid perspective**

The wrong conduct of leaders usually is not the exclusive result of undesirable, clearly discernible worldview factors. Other inner and outer factors may also be contributing reasons. For example, sinful greed among the rich or theft among the destitute. And, as said previously, an interaction between these two and worldview factors are usually present, the one sometimes strengthening the other. In the examples of the wrong conduct of leaders (see next article) I have therefore theoretically isolated and focused only on the worldview reasons.

Nevertheless, an analysis from a worldview perspective still provides a broader view on the issue than studying leadership only from the limited focus of, for example, psychology, politics, economics, anthropology etcetera.

Some writers to be referred to do not distinguish clearly between religion, worldview and culture. In this article and the following ones, I will also often use the two concepts “worldview” and “culture” together since they cannot be separated. But they should nevertheless be clearly distinguished.

In my view religion is the reaction of a human being to what/who s/he regards as absolute authority, worthy of worship and obedience. One’s worldview indicates what *is* real to you as well as how you *ought* to live in the world. Culture is the more visible manifestations of both one’s deep religious commitment and one’s invisible worldview.

### **8.8 Inadmissible generalisation?**

Since not every African, Westerner or Christian adhere to an identical African, Western or Christian worldview, one may be blamed for gross and inadmissible generalisation and reification when speaking about *the* African, *the* Western or *the* Christian worldview and/or culture. I am, however, convinced that in every one of these worldviews some general characteristics can be identified.

Though Gyekye (1997:xii) acknowledges the multiplicity of African worldviews and cultures as well as mutual influence between them, he still writes:

... yet it may be true that in many instances the different cultural forms or practices can be said to be essentially variations on the same theme ... This is the reason why a number of scholars recognize the existence of common features or commonalities among the cultures of Africa.

Jahn (1961:98 ff.), on the basis of different previous scholarly works on African philosophy and worldview, also accepts common denominators or concepts to interpret all African worldviews. For all their differences they agree basically with one another. At the same time, he acknowledges that it can be difficult to explain these common characteristics in European concepts.

Also, Nürnberger (2007:3) writes that, while he is aware of countless varieties and overlaps in worldviews, as a scholar he has to categorise and generalise. Some may regard such intellectual constructs as unforgivable. But reconstructive constructs are indispensable tools of scientific understanding. There is a fundamental difference between a scientific construct that is an attempt to explain the similarities and differences between phenomena and one that is a pure figment of the scholar's imagination. There may, for example, be millions of individual flowers and leaves to be studied, but a botanist will have to distinguish the universally valid difference between flowers and leaves.

### **8.9 No static cultures**

The necessity for scholars to generalise, however, does not imply that worldviews and the cultures they study are static phenomena.

Worldviews and cultures continuously change. But some aspects require more time to change. One can distinguish between a mixture of fast and slow variables. Concerning fast changes technology, like cell-phones, may be an example. But beliefs, ways of thinking, worldviews, values and customs usually change more gradually.

A specific context will influence both these two types of changes. Urban settings may speed up the process. A lacuna of the series will unfortunately be that nothing will be said about the fact of rapid and increasing urbanisation all over Africa and its impact on worldviews. It can, for instance, lead to religious indifference, increasing secularism and consumer materialism (cf. Shorter & Onyanda, 1997 and De Visser, 2001:184 ff.).

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### **8.10 A last remark**

Lastly, by here focusing on leadership from a Christian perspective (see the last article in the series) I am not at all suggesting that only Christians can be good leaders while people from every other faith will be failures. One can mention examples of people from other faiths who were and are leadership-models compared with some of those who called themselves Christians.

## **9. The influence of the traditional African worldview**

Leaving behind all the prolegomena, reservations and apologies, we are now ready to tackle the influence on leadership ideas of, first, the traditional African worldview. When Turaki (1997:39) wrote that a new concept of African leadership is needed he also reminded us that “African leadership problems is deeply rooted in (Africa’s) traditional and cultural background”.

### **9.1 *The basic contours of the traditional African worldview***

Knowledge about the basic contours of the traditional African worldview is essential to understand the conduct of African leaders to be described in the next contribution. Out of the many available resources I have selected the excellent summary of the Nigerian Christian theologian, Turaki (1993:249 ff.; 1997:39 ff. and 1999:243 ff.).

In the last work he summarises the traditional African worldview in the following four main closely interrelated concepts: (1) cosmic harmony (holism), (2) the pervasive influence of the spirit world (spiritism), (3) power consciousness (dynamism) and (4) kinship relations (communalism).

The first concept, cosmic harmony (1) means that nothing that exists is separable or isolated from everything else. Everything is included in the one whole of reality. Turaki calls it “holism”. I would prefer the term “ontological monism”. Everything from the lowest material things to the highest gods is considered to be mere parts of this whole. Therefore, no clear distinction exists between the different levels of an encompassing reality.

Nürenberger (2007) indicates how closely this first feature is again connected to the second (2), especially ancestor veneration, still common among many African Christians and their leaders.

And throughout his study De Visser (2001: e.g. 39 ff.) shows the very important role that the third concept (3) of authority and power still plays in the minds of many African Christian leaders. Also, Walls (1996:122) indicates that the

Christian faith is especially acceptable to Africans when giving access to power, protection and prosperity. Jesus Christ is primarily viewed as a figure of power and not a humble servant-leader (p. 129).

Also, Davidson (1993:246 ff.) described the idolisation of power and its implications amongst post-independent African political leaders. Power leads to greed but is also accompanied by fear to lose power. Therefore, rivals are blamed of secret conspiracies and are even eliminated. Finally, these “pirates of power” (as Davidson calls them) have to be forcefully removed from leadership.

We should, however, remember again that power and wealth at all costs is not only characteristic of African leaders. The love of money to the point of madness – and for the price of doing so let others pay – today is a global idol.

More will follow in the next article about the fourth concept, viz. kinship relations or communalism.

## 10. To follow

This necessary reconnaissance with its many byways laid the table for the meal to come in the next contribution. It will discuss the many implications the traditional African worldview has on leadership on our continent, including South Africa.

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