
The influence of the traditional African worldviews and Western colonialism on leadership in Africa

*Bennie J van der Walt
School of Philosophy
Potchefstroom Campus
North-West University
benniejvanderwalt@gmail.com*

Abstract

Weak and often corrupt leadership was identified in a previous article in this journal as one of the root causes of the present lamentable state affairs on the African continent. Arguing from the presupposition that failed leadership, apart from other factors, can also be the result of distorted worldviews, this follow-up contribution focusses on two different worldviews, viz. the traditional African and the colonial Western.

In the first main section it reviews negative implications of aspects of the traditional African worldview and culture on leadership. Some of the examples discussed are the following. Communalism (also called 'ubuntu') may encourage ills like nepotism and favouritism. State capture can be explained from Africans' view of the state as a hierarchical, totalitarian and foreign institution. Africa's view of time and history may result in leaders' lack of managing time and planning for the future.

The second main section investigates the influence of Western imperialism and colonialism on post-colonial leadership, especially the idea of the nation-state and its powers.

1. Introduction

As one of the root causes of the ongoing crisis on the African continent the previous article in this journal (cf. Van der Walt, 2019) identified failed leadership. It also mentioned that the traditional African worldview and culture are still influencing its leadership styles. And it furthermore described the main contours of this worldview.

The present contribution will now, firstly, provide some concrete examples of the influence of the traditional worldview on the conduct of many past and contemporary African leaders. However, since Africa has also experienced Western imperialism and colonialism, bad leadership cannot be attributed merely to traditional worldview influences. Therefore, secondly, attention will be paid to the impact of Western colonial ideas about leadership in order to attain a more comprehensive view of the complex situation.

2. The influence of communalism or *ubuntu*

Especially after our first democratic election in 1994 many South African writers, black and white, saw *ubuntu* as *the* key to many of our problems. Examples are Tutu (1995:xiv), Mbigi & Maree (1995), Battle (1996), Shutte (2001), Abrahams (2016) and Ntarangwi, (2011). According to a well-known African idiom it means "a person is a person through other persons". As mentioned in the previous article it is viewed as one of the most prominent features of traditional African culture. According to Adeyemo (1979) to a traditional African even salvation meant to be accepted as a part of your own group. The opposite of salvation will be the fear to be rejected by your own kin.

But *ubuntu* as a norm is not accepted by everyone, whether European or African. An example of the continuing debate is some recent issues of the *SA Journal of Philosophy*. Metz (previous articles and 2014), Chimakonum (2016) and Mwipikeni (2008) are enthusiast about *ubuntu* as a moral guide.

But according to Matolino (2015), Matolino & Kwindingwi (2013) *ubuntu* has stalled both as a way of life and as an ethical theory and has reached its end.

Previously Bujo (1990:102) mentioned that community members nowadays abuse the traditional solidarity provided by their relatives and become burdens to the people in leadership positions with higher incomes.

Nyasani (1997:59 ff.) is also critical about this so-called African sociability. According to him it does not leave enough space for individual initiatives and decisions. It also results in the shift of personal responsibility to some super-personal “we” or group. Everybody’s responsibility becomes nobody’s!

According to Nyasani the idea that Africa is the example *par excellence* of brotherhood, sociality and other labels is an African platitude to confuse those Westerners who know the continent rather superficially. One may be surprised by an alarming degree of indifference and egoism on the continent, often in the form of tribalism and even racism.

Ubuntu should therefore not be idealised and understood as universal acceptance of others. It is confined to the in-group of one’s family, tribe or ethnic group. Therefore, you should only feel ashamed when you do something wrong against your own kin and your transgression is discovered, not against any outsider. This kind of worldview promotes ethnic hate and a disregard for others’ rights and wellbeing (cf. Achebe, 1983:5-9; Okulu, 1987a:43-51; 1987b:87 ff. and Turaki, 1997) but also widespread corruption (Okulu, 1987a 342). Gyekye (1997:252 ff., 278 ff.) mentions more negative implications of such a communitarian social arrangement.

The same worldview trait also led to a web of nepotism. Leadership positions are given not to the very best, competent and experienced people with the necessary skills. Satisfied with feathering their own nest these leaders usually also hide their incompetence by blaming all kinds of scapegoats like other people, bad luck and even vengeful ancestors.

My main point of critique is that *ubuntu* cannot provide Christians with the correct biblically-founded norms for their conduct. The direction of one’s life as a Christian should be determined neither by the individual (the West) nor by the community (as in Africa). It should be determined by our Creator’s revealed ordinances as will be explained in detail in the last article in this series.

3. State capture

It is general knowledge today (cf. numerous newspapers and other reports, several books and legal commissions of enquiry – too many to mention here) that for years some of our South African political and other leaders were involved in attempts to get hold of state funds and its institutions. How could this be explained from the traditional African worldview perspective?

3.1 The possible influence of the traditional African viewpoint

One of the most popular ideas about leadership in Africa (cf. previous article) is that a leader, especially a political leader with much power, should be like a father to his children, caring for every need of the citizens of his country. In Africa the distinction between public and private has hardly been recognised. Therefore, political leaders and their officials exercise their power over state finances and property not as a form of public service but as private property. A public office can be accepted as a route to personal power and wealth.

This attitude is expressed in the African proverb: "The goat eats where it is tethered". Grifford (1998:56) refers to it as "the politics of the belly", and Miriithi (1996:88) as "the culture of eating". Other writers use expressions like the personally appropriated state, the predatory, extraction or vampire state.

On the one hand the "little men" depend on the "big men" through whom they can share in the good things of life, while, on the other hand, their "clients" will in turn provide the necessary political support for their patron. (More about clientelism below.) In such a situation to speak about "corruption" makes no sense but it does nothing to develop openness, transparency, efficiency and accountability.

Gyekye (1997:171 ff. and 192 ff.) wrote an excellent chapter on political corruption, explaining what it is, its different forms in traditional and postcolonial Africa and its character. His brief definition of political corruption is that it is the misuse of one's political or official position for personal ones in violation of accepted moral and legal norms.

3.2 Leadership corruption also stemming from the colonial legacy

What has happened the past decade in South Africa should not only be understood in the light of the traditional idea of the ruler as father but also the colonial legacy. Grifford (1998:3) wrote about the last mentioned:

The colonial administrations were both centralised and authoritarian ... power was experienced as coming from above rather than flowing from below. Thus the ruled developed a sense of the state as an alien institution to be feared but also to be deceived and exploited since it existed on a plane above the people whom it governed, beyond any chance of control.

What counts in politics (and economics) is not moral integrity but influence and power ... Sin, shame and guilt are felt by individuals and groups only in relation to their kinship community and not in relation to outsiders and strangers ...

The state is an outsider, and thus there is little sense of sin, shame and guilt in actions involving the state (Turaki, 2011:179 and cf. also 2010b).

Fowler agrees with Turaki:

While community is usually alive and well in Africa in the context of the extended family, it has not been extended to the experience of the modern state. Here the individualistic Western notion of the state as organisation prevails. Consequently, people experience little bonding or community with their own fellow citizens in the state (Fowler, 1995:139).

Gyekye (1997:195) also writes that in Africa the colonial and post-colonial governments were viewed as alien institutions. The people and especially powerful leaders' business were to get as much from the state as they could without getting in trouble. Political corruption thrived in such an atmosphere where commitment to the national, public or common interest is weak and constantly being subverted by non-public loyalties. (More about Western nation-statism will follow below under 12.)

Leaders plundering or capturing the state for their own benefit and kinship are therefore not regarded as crooks but as heroes. Greed, bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, lies and other forms of corrupt behaviour are not considered as sins, the way Christians should see it (Kunhiyop, 2008:164 ff.).

However, in the light of the Bible the state (government and citizens) is an ordination of God with the divine task to be both a shield and a sword, acting both as protection and punishment. It has to rescue the oppressed and vanquish the oppressor (Stiller, 1989:1-4).

4. The African view of history

About the African concept of time and history Mbiti (1969) wrote that traditional people are primarily orientated to the past with limited attention for the future.

It is not the place here to go into the long debate which followed upon his statement. But I don't think Mbiti was entirely wrong. De Visser (2001:39 ff., 52 ff.) clearly indicates how important the past is still in the lives of African Christians. And other writers view the already mentioned "culture of eating" ("let me grab what is still available today, it may not be there tomorrow") as a result of Africans' little concern for the future.

Traditional Africa's preoccupation with the past (e.g. the ancestors or their freedom struggle) also leads to the present neglect of the maintenance of infrastructure and a lack of strategic planning for the future (cf. e.g. Kinoti,

1994:45 and Adeyemo, 2009:18). However, if you do not take care in maintaining the infrastructure of the present, you will have to face future disaster. And if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!

Real leaders have to provide vision. They should look ahead to the future to intervene before a disaster takes place, not only after it has occurred.

5. Deification of hierarchical power

Power consciousness was in the previous article indicated as a third major characteristic of the African worldview. It is usually displayed in great wealth. This leads to authoritarian, oppressive and unaccountable leaders, surrounded by a coterie of other, lower power-seekers who are also neither concerned about the future of the state nor the harsh conditions of the masses of poor citizens at the grass roots level (cf. Gyekye, 1997:177 ff.).

The deification of power also causes the idea of staying in power for ever. It can even lead to a warrior instinct. Adeyemo writes that even after independence African leaders are fighting, now against themselves, while Africa actually do not need militarists but builders (Adeyemo, 2006 and 2009:109, 110).

It is again Nyasani (1997:129 ff.) who is very critical of the top-down leadership structures and the blind respect, reverence and obedience of their subjects to every command dictated from above. Nor is one allowed to confront a guilty person directly – definitely not a leader.

6. A lack of self-discipline

Achebe (1983:27 ff.) devotes a long chapter to indiscipline amongst Africans and their leaders. He defines it as follows: "Indiscipline is failure or refusal to submit one's desires and actions to the restraints of orderly social conduct in recognition of the rights and desires of others".

The danger of indiscipline amongst leaders is that their followers will follow suit, which can escalate into lawlessness. If a leader's power gives him immunity from common censure and legal prosecution the powerless will turn him/her into a model and imitate his indiscipline, bringing a whole society under a climate of indiscipline (p. 32). Like other writers Achebe also emphasises that discipline is not the result of supervision from outside but imposed by the individual from within (p. 28)

Nyasani (1997:134 ff.) also devotes considerable space to what he calls the root problem in African culture, viz. a disregard for self-discipline combined with the fact that one has to be pushed into action instead of accepting personal responsibility. Without making any apology, he uses words like laxity, lethargy, distraughtness and indecisiveness in matters of social concern among leading officials which also result in the malallocation of the necessary resources. According to him many Africans also keep themselves busy with petty issues and irrelevant palaver. Nyasani is not the only one that emphasises a lack of work ethic but also Adeyemo (1997:40), Ilo (2012:121) and Kunhiyop (2008:168).

7. Tribalism and clientelism

In passing, in point 2 above, tribalism was already mentioned. This phenomenon and clientelism will also provide additional explanation for state capture, already discussed.

Already in the previous century Legum (1970:102) correctly predicted that tribalism will remain with Africa also during the 21st century. However, he acknowledges that tribalism is not something peculiar about our continent. He mentioned examples of inter-ethnic clashes elsewhere in the world.

7.1 Tribalism defined

But what is tribalism? Different African writers described it in the volume edited by Buconyori (1977) from different viewpoints, for example a historical (during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times), lingual, sociological, psychological and biblical perspective. They also agree that a tribalist feels secure only when he or she is with the people of his/her own tribe, but that it can also be basic to several conflicts which are tearing up the African continent.

The following definitions of tribalism and ethnicity are given:

Tribalism expresses a complex reality which is cultural, ideological and political. In all tribalisms, the general thesis is that each tribe or ethnic group wants to dominate others by all means. In ethnicity, there is a psychological tendency to favour one's own social group and make it the only point of reference in everything (Buconyori, 1977:2).

7.2 Both defensive and aggressive

According to Legum (1970) tribalism can be both defensive and aggressive. Defensive in resisting real or imagined threats from external ideas, forces or other tribes to existing interests. Aggressive in enlarging its members' potential share of opportunities lying outside the confines of its own.

Tribalism has mainly three functions: to *maintain* the internal cohesion of an ethnic group; to *defend* themselves against external pressures of a rival system, whether traditional or modern; to *expand* the interests and opportunities of their own members, at first in the colonial, later on in a post-colonial situation. All three functions can lead to inter-tribal conflicts.

7.3 Its manifestations

Waruta (1992:126) draws attention to the visible manifestations or effects of tribalism, like divisiveness, corruption, incompetence, the scarcity of resources and opportunities, the disintegration of nationhood and corrupt leadership. The strong bond with one's own group could exist at the expense of others. For example, when the manager of a public institution chooses to employ someone from his own ethnic group, even though a better qualified and experienced person for the job who happens to belong to another tribe is available.

Waruta (1992:134) finally mentions that in many countries in Africa new groups, not based on tribal relations but on class interests, are becoming a common phenomenon. He calls this the new form of "tribalism" of the politicians, the rich and the elite, the "Mabenzi tribe" or the Mercedes Benz owners. He adds that they are posing a greater threat to society as a whole than the earlier "tribalism".

7.4 Different opinions

But unlike Turaki (1997) Waruta does not see tribalism as part of traditional African cultures. According to him (p. 123) there were tribes in Africa but Africans were not necessary tribalists. The colonial rulers in their policy of "divide and rule" and the preferential treatment of some ethnic groups created tribes and antagonised them against each other.

Davidson (1993:206 ff.) explains the situation as follows. The European colonisers accepted that Africans lived in tribes and that tribal loyalties were the only "primitive" stuff of traditional African politics. So, they divided Africans politically into tribes. The traditional regional interests flowed into the political components of the new parliamentary structures, often assuming an ethnic guise.

7.5 *Clientelism or patronage*

What rapidly developed was, according to Davidson, something different and more divisive than tribalism, viz. a politics of clientelism or patronage dependent on personal, family, kinship and political networks of interest. It has become *the way* in which politics in Africa largely operates. It flourishes on disorder, is utterly destructive of civil society, makes hay of morality and flouts the rule of law (p. 11). It led to a dog-fight for the spoils of political power.

Political leaders at regional and national level gained support for their election by allocating to local leaders state resources over which they have influence and control. In competition with rival politicians they tried to maximise their own support. The result was not only a race for political offices and the spoils of power. Also, the difference between single-party rule and multi-party rule disappeared under clientelist corruption.

The more incompetent the state became, the wider the gap grew between the state and the rest of society, including the gap between towns and countryside, the rich and the poor. And the wider the gap, the more unbridled the subversions of clientelism when people seek self-defence in kinship and other ties. Finally, the weakened and bankrupt states could easily be subverted or overthrown by the military.

One can accept Davidson's view about clientelism on the condition that it is not always a replacement of tribalism but often combined with politicised tribal loyalties.

8. Punctuality and managing time

Nyasani (1997:152 ff.) throws another stone when he writes that "In Africa there is no regard for time and punctuality". According to him the inhabitants of Africa may wear fancy watches on their wrists but, alas, they are mere ornaments for decoration. They do not indicate the time something should be undertaken or terminated. Africans do not follow clock-time but event-time, they do not use but make time. However, punctuality should be a sign of respect for both one's superiors and inferiors.

9. Three reasons for the poor management of resources

Is it true that Africans are poor managers of vital public resources? Or is this another piece of propaganda of the West to blame African leaders for the fact that most of the continent's vast population lives in utter hopelessness? This is the question of Muriithi (1996:87). He does not answer it explicitly but at least indicate three reasons why Africa is often plagued by inept, reckless and corrupt leaders.

He first evaluates the way public institutions are performing as an indication of the quality of their leadership. The results are alarming in comparison with the success of similar projects in the rest of the world. For example, one out of three agricultural projects failed in West Africa while half failed in East African countries.

The main reason according to Muriithi is again selfish, greedy and corrupt politicians without responsibility and accountability. Public bodies and projects have been the victims of poor management because political leaders consumed the funds meant to run them.

A second reason is inadequate education and training of leaders and managers for the jobs they have to perform. Therefore, they often run the state like a grocery store.

The third reason he mentions is again that nepotism or favouritism shown to a relative or supporter rather than considering merit, education and experience when appointing people in leading positions.

10. Not yet Uhuru

Thirty years after independence of his country a prominent Kenyan politician, Oginga Odinga, was interviewed by Prof. Oruka, an expert of the sage philosophy or worldview of Africa, (cf. Oruka,1990). Odinga was regarded as a philosophical sage who raised critical questions about what people usually take for granted (cf. Oruka, 1992). Odinga played an important role in the struggle for the independence of his country. But three decades later, he regarded post-independence as in most cases, wasted years. He asked for a second liberation – this time not from white but black domination. “We wasted thirty years. We concentrated on power, wealth, personalities and tribes” (p. 30).

According to him independence was given formally but not in reality. The previous colonial powers applied indirect economic rule by winning the cooperation of greedy African leaders. Real freedom, however, required also cultural and economic freedom from the outside world. According to Odinga the first liberation instead brought economic stagnation, mismanagement, inefficiency, a lack of accountability, political dictatorship and more.

To him colonialism was like a naked poison being forced into one's mouth while one is struggling to reject it. Post-independence, on the other hand, is like a poison mixed with your favourite drink like greed. But the aim and results in both were the same.

Oruka's book abounds with valuable insights of the sage, Odinga, on what good leadership was in traditional Africa as well as how it should have been in an independent Africa. But unfortunately, he was a voice in the wilderness. The expected second liberation Africa hoped for during the nineties of the previous century did not materialise.

But can it in fairness be said that poor leadership and management should only be attributed to some weak points of the traditional African view of the world? Such a viewpoint will turn a blind eye to possible Western influences to which we now turn attention.

11. The legacy of Western colonial imperialism in Africa

Western involvement in Africa started already with the Portuguese during the 15th century, followed by the Dutch in the 16th and the French and British in the second half of the 17th century. In November 1884, at the Berlin Conference, the whole continent was partitioned between the European nations. This was the beginning of formal Western imperialism and colonialism in Africa.

But Western imperialism did not end when (between 1956 and 1968) most African countries already gained independence. It was replaced by post-colonial imperialism. (Cf. e.g. Turaki, 1993 and Fowler, 1995.) It only differed in two important respects. It shifted from formal to informal imperialism and the centre of imperialist power in Africa changed from Europe to mainly the United States. The former colonial powers wanted to ensure that their former colonies remained within their especially economic influence. There has also been a net economic gain for the West in its so-called aid to African countries.

Western imperialism was, therefore, differently viewed by the West as it was experienced by Africa.

11.1 The Western view on colonialism

Boer (1984:56) summarised the view of the Western colonial imperialists as follows:

Colonialism is a form of imperialism based on a divine mandate and designed to bring liberation – spiritual, cultural, economic and political – by sharing the blessings of the Christ-inspired civilization of the West with a people suffering under satanic forces of oppression, ignorance and disease. It should be affected by a combination of political, economic and religious forces that cooperate under a regime seeking the benefit of both ruler and ruled.

From this description it is evident that the Western colonisers viewed themselves, their religion, worldview and culture as superior to that of the inferior viewed people in their colonies. Because of the influence of inter alia the ideas of evolution and progress it was believed that civilization has reached its apex in the white European civilization. A secularised form of missionary zeal compelled them to share with or, if necessary, force upon the so-called uncivilised or underdeveloped races of colour their own culture. Western domination was believed to be the way to the upliftment of the dirty, lazy, immoral, primitive, subhuman pagans of Africa (cf. Turaki, 2010a:117-124).

11.2 The other side of colonialism

Viewed from the side of a colonised person and nation, colonialism had a different face:

A country is a “colonial” country where the real dynamic economic activity is in *foreign* hands, nourished by *foreign* capital, directed by a *foreign* spirit of enterprise, primarily directed toward *foreign* interests. A “colonial” country is therefore a country of which people and land are, in the last instance, instruments and means for *foreign* purposes, and where *foreign* decisions determine these peoples’ destiny (Boer, 1984:23).

Boer (cf. also 1979) and other authors are of the opinion that, in spite of the lofty motivations of the imperialist colonisers, colonialism was basically economically motivated. The political and other civilising motives were all subservient to its primary economic aims.

Also, Turaki (1993:112 and 2010b:125-140) criticises the supposed civilisation aims of colonialism in Nigeria. The British rulers often even viewed the Western Christian missions as subversive to their own aims and

voiced their disapproval of their work in education, for this would bring about enlightenment to and protest from the natives. They preferred the Nigerians to be left in perpetual “darkness” for the sake of maintaining the *status quo*.

According to Turaki some Africans therefore called colonialism the holy trinity of the trader (the Father), the missionary (the Son) and the alien government (the Holy Spirit). The religious man (missionary) taught the natives to lay up treasures in heaven. This enabled the commercial man (trader) to grab their earthly treasures. And it facilitated the foreign government to regulate how these earthly treasures are to be exported back to Europe.

11.3 The Nigerian example

Turaki, an eminent Evangelical theologian, provides the following description of colonialism (from about 1900 to 1960) in Nigeria:

The colonial legacy refers to the colonial philosophy of nation-state building which used racial, ethnic or tribal religions and cultural values to establish a colonial social order. Religion, culture and social status were used by the Colonial Administration as means of social stratification, differentiation and recruitment into colonial service ... The Nigerian social environment was nurtured under religions and cultural intolerance, racial (tribal) inequity and differential and preferential treatment of ethnic groups ... it also led to negative social values, such as elitism, greed, dominance, aggressiveness, exploitation, social status, parochialism, tribalism, regionalism, etc. (Turaki, 1993:7. Cf. also 2010a and 2010b: 88 ff.)

11.4 Long-term implications

I have taken some time to draw attention to colonialism for two reasons. First, because we cannot understand the present leadership crisis in Africa apart from the colonial legacy. I give the word again to Turaki (1997:83), now about the post-colonial situation:

The political systems and structures at independence in most African countries were indeed a continuity of the colonial unjust systems and did not restructure the colonial systems which were not built on the principles of social justice, equality, freedom and rights. Some states used the inherited colonial systems to boost, strengthen and entrenched personal, racial, tribal and regional dominance over others ... The politicians which inherited such could not stand the test of time and many collapsed into military or one-party dictatorships.

11.5 The cry for decolonisation in South Africa

The second reason for the relevance of colonialism is the present voices for decolonisation in my own country, South Africa. This movement gained

momentum about four years ago when a black student, Chumani Maxwele, threw a bucket of human faeces on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town.

Of all the African countries probably, South Africa was the longest under white rule, first that of the Dutch and then for very long the British empire. Together whites and blacks, however, fought a bitter war during 1899-1902 to free themselves from English colonialism. 130 000 South Africans including my grandmother was thrown in an English concentration camp where her father died, together with 26 000 Afrikaner men, women and mostly children in camps all over South Africa together with an estimated 15 000 to 20 000 black people.

Today “transformation” and “decolonisation” are again buzz words in South Africa. Its supporters are mainly black intellectuals and activists searching for an own African identity, supported also by white academics locally and overseas. They intend to revive their precolonial roots, different from the Western and the Christian. Western education, especially in the curriculum of human and social sciences, they say, had alienated them from their original worldview and culture.

Decolonising education in South Africa, therefore, usually go hand in hand with the Africanisation of the educational curriculum. (Cf. e.g. the recent special issue, vol. 35, no. 4, Dec. 2016 of the *South African Journal of Philosophy* containing more than a dozen contributions on the need for the Africanisation of philosophy as well as Mbembe’s solution, 2016:37 of “pluriversalism”.)

I am not going to evaluate here the demand for decolonisation and Africanisation in higher education. It contains both positive and negative elements. I have my own reservations about especially its more radical, ideologically-driven forms which finally can become as oppressive as that which it rejects (Western colonialism). One should also keep in mind that any kind of ideology in a way remains negatively bound to that which it is against (cf. the valuable analysis of Goudzwaard, 1984).

But let us look a bit deeper into the Western view of the state applied and accepted at the independence of the African countries.

12. The Western view of the nation-state and political power

Especially since the Enlightenment the West believed in the absolute power of the state to direct and develop a good society that will bring well-being to everyone. Fowler (1995:71) called this the illusion of the political kingdom also voiced in Kwame Nkrumah's famous saying after the independence of his country: "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things will be added unto you". To gain control of the political power of the state, it was believed, would enable Africans to build new societies of freedom and prosperity.

As said, the many tribes in Africa constituted the major political units in the colonial dealings with Africa. And, as indicated already, the colonial rulers often favoured one tribe above others. They linked political identity with ethnic identity and the African leaders followed, exploiting tribal identity for own political gain. This politization of ethnicity, as we know, fuelled many tribal wars in postcolonial Africa.

Fowler therefore indicated that, while individual political leaders are often corrupt, political corruption and the abuse of power are not peculiar to Africa. The root of the problem lies much deeper. The absolute power attributed to the state by the Western world makes it always highly susceptible to corruption and the abuse of power. The Western view on the state, imposed on Africa by means of economic aid and sometimes even the force of arms, made African politicians even more susceptible to corruption.

12.1 Wide implications

Also Davidson (1993) describes in detail how the idea of a nation-state was developed in the West from about the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century and imposed on post-independent Africa since, according to the West, Africa had no nations or states, only tribes.

And, as it seemed to be the only way to escape from colonial domination, the African leaders had to accept it. When refusing, they were called trouble makers. This was done in spite of the fact that, firstly, in the past examples of well-organised states or kingdoms existed in Africa already during the Middle Ages (Davidson, 1993:299 ff). And, secondly, while the idea of a nation-state already proved in the West to be a failure (cf. e.g. Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism).

The Western influence was not limited to government and politics. Because of its alien, foreign nature it led to total social dislocation. On the one side of this structural incoherence were the political, economic and social structures, founded on the secularist values of the West. On the other side there were the remains of the traditional African structures founded on traditional African norms for life. The first dominated in the life of the political leaders of the new nations, while the second dominated the social life of the majority grassroots Africans.

12.2 A failure

The reason for the failure of the idea of the nation-state was an absolutisation of both the nation and the state. To make an idol of the nation-state implies that it rules in an absolutist-authoritarian way over all areas of life. No real freedom can therefore be achieved. And people also tend to expect – though in vain – everything from the state. But finally, no liberation but only alienation occurs (cf. again section 3. above).

Apart from his excellent analysis of nation-statism as “the black man’s burden”, Davidson himself (a historian) could not provide a solution. Because of the divorce the nation-state caused between the rulers and the ruled in Africa, he only suggests more participatory government. And – as a possible ray of hope? – he mentions that it took the European nations more than two centuries to settle their political problems, while Africans had to adopt the same ideas in only about half a century.

12.3 Similar developments in South Africa?

Possible parallels can be indicated between what happened elsewhere in Africa and in South Africa. Goudzwaard (1984:43) indicated how during apartheid it was argued that the existence of different ethnic groups or nations had priority over the existence of the state. Different states or homelands were needed. White nationalism and a white state reinforced each other and superseded the principle that one must treat all the citizens of a geographical region forming a state equally.

But on the other hand, some white and even some black citizens of South Africa regard our new democratic dispensation as a majoritarian regime which discriminate against minority groups. What could be the solution?

12.4 Possible solutions

It will be difficult – perhaps impossible? – to satisfy, on the one hand, the advocates of a return to the traditional African worldview and, on the other

hand, its critics about solutions for the leadership crisis, on our continent including one's own country. Let me therefore conclude with the suggestions of one Christian writer who knew, respected and always defended the good traits of traditional African worldviews and cultures. He can therefore not be regarded as simply another Westerner who in a paternalistic way presented solutions to Africa without Africans participating.

Fowler (1995:155ff.) has the following important starting points which may improve the quality of leadership on the continent: (1) The unlimited power of the state to shape the whole of society should be replaced by limited authority and power in order to develop political structures for justice. (2) The exploitation of ethnicity for political ends should stop and be replaced by multi-ethnic political cooperation. (3) Conflictive majoritarian democracy should be replaced by collaborative consensus democracy. (4) Civil society should be built by a strong, vigorous network of organisations, institutions and social values to counter state domination. (5) Africa should also overcome its syndrome of dependency. Not only political and economic dependency, but also intellectually. (6) The real liberation of Africa is a challenging and complex task. Probably one of the greatest failures of postcolonial African leaders has been to see this task as too simple and too readily achievable. (7) In conclusion Fowler emphasises that what is needed cannot be developed by summit conferences of the political and social elite alone. The grassroots of the African societies should be actively involved.

13. A review and a preview

The preceding pages proved that failed leadership on the African continent can be attributed to the influence of both the traditional African worldview as well as the Western worldview especially in the form of European imperialist colonialism and its ideas about the state.

Yet, the picture about leadership on the continent is not complete without, on the one hand, the influence of contemporary Western scholarly theories about leadership, popularised in numerous books about management and also used in Africa. And, on the other hand, the influence of both past missionary Christianity as well as present forms of truncated Christian beliefs. How Bible-believing Christians still employ the Scriptures as directives for good leadership will also have to be considered. These will be among the important topics to be investigated in a following article in this journal.

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