

# Entering through the narrow gate and walking the hard road: The role of Christian leaders in exposing moral evil in the South African workplace

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The South African workplace is a complex one; it is influenced by our conflict-ridden past and it needs to meet a host of contemporary challenges. This article discusses the nature and outworking of moral evil in the workplace with reference to the local government sector. It is argued that in counteracting incompetence, a lack of responsibility, injustice towards honest staff, narrow group solidarity and the abusive exercise of executive authority, Christian leaders can legitimately and constructively engage in the public space. In order to do so, they need to deepen their relationship with God, develop moral discernment, and grow in their ability to act responsibly in the cause of human solidarity.

**Gaan deur die nou poort in en stap die moeilike pad: Die rol van Christelike leiers in die openbaarmaking van morele boosheid in die Suid-Afrikaanse werkplek.** Die Suid-Afrikaanse werkplek is kompleks – dit word beïnvloed deur ons konflikbelaaide verlede, maar moet ook 'n menigte hedendaagse uitdagings die hoof bied. In hierdie artikel word die aard en uitwerking van sedelike bedorwenheid in die werkplek met verwysing na die plaaslike regering bespreek. Daar word betoog dat Christelike leiers die teenwerking van onbekwaamheid, die gebrek aan verantwoordelikheid, onregverdigheid teenoor eerlike personeel, eng groepsamehorigheid en misbruikende uitoefening van gesag deur die bestuur, geldig en konstruktief in die openbaar kan aanpak. Vir hierdie taak moet hulle egter versterk word deur hulle verhouding met God te verdiep, morele onderskeiding te ontwikkel, in hulle vaardigheid om verantwoordelik op te tree te groei, en hulle te beywer vir die bevordering van menslike samehorigheid.

## Introduction

The title of this article draws on a statement of Jesus:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Mt 7:13, New Revised Standard Version)

This is a pertinent warning, since it refers to the choices that people make in life and the moral consequences of their choices. This passage from Matthew's gospel is part of the 'Sermon on the Mount' and follows immediately after Jesus' summary of what is expected of Christian disciples: 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets' (Mt 7:12). In the following verses (Mt 7:15–27), true and false disciples are contrasted in four striking ways. Firstly, the lost follow the easy road to destruction, but the saved will find life. Secondly, some people appear to be sheep, but they are actually false prophets and ravenous wolves. Their motives are malicious and they do not bear 'good fruit'. Thirdly, some are self-deceived and their actions appear powerful and impressive to others, but they are not known by God. Finally, whereas foolish people do not listen to God and build their houses on sand, the wise person hears and acts on God's word.

This text was chosen as an introduction to this paper because it raises key issues for Christian leaders, such as moral (or immoral) motives, choices, actions and consequences. It further highlights the temptations and dangers of both personal and social life. This and other biblical texts are cited as the Bible is a common source of teaching and moral wisdom upon which all Christians draw. But it is important to recognise that the interpretation of biblical texts, especially when they are used in relation to social matters is contested. Texts have also been used in the past in South Africa and elsewhere to defend dubious social policy. Hence the meanings of texts within their literary and social contexts need to be taken into account and their applicability

in contemporary contexts evaluated. Nevertheless, in an African context, the Bible continues to play an important role in Christian life and, arguably, ought to play a more important role in the moral formation of leaders.

Recently, the connection between Christian ethics and business in a (South) African context was discussed by Fourie (2012:46–60) and the role of Christians with respect to corruption was analysed by Theron and Lotter (2012:96–117) and by Vorster (2012:133–147). Toryough (2010:1–8) has discussed the role of a biblical ethics of work for African nations. In an earlier article (Kretzschmar 2012c:125–146), the nature of a Christian ethic of work and what constitutes good work was discussed. This article is a reflective, critical engagement with the moral issues that arise in local government from the perspective of Christian ethics and leadership. The specific purpose of this paper is to discuss the nature of moral evil, outline how it is manifested in the sector of local government, and identify what role Christian leaders can play within the workplace.

Two theological disciplines, namely Christian ethics and Christian leadership, form the main theoretical framework for this article, but sources from other disciplines are also used. Christian ethics (or moral theology) is the theological discipline that engages in critical reflection on human behaviour in every sphere of life on the basis of moral norms, obligations and values. As such it is a normative rather than a purely descriptive ethic. It assesses what is claimed to be valid, morally acceptable behaviour – also in public life. It is further concerned with the formation of moral character and the promotion of moral action.

This article also uses the terms ‘Christian leader’ and ‘Christian leadership’. A Christian leader could be defined as someone who holds a position or office, or is given authority by others who recognise his or her leadership, and who exercises this authority in conformity with the tenets of his or her faith. According to Kouzes and Posner (2004:1–38), Christian leaders need to ‘model the way’, ‘inspire a shared vision’, ‘challenge the process’, ‘enable others to act’ and ‘encourage the heart’. However, all Christians can be empowered to provide leadership in a more general sense (Bentley 2010:552–558). Such believers may not hold a position of great significance but they can still exercise leadership by means of their moral example. Hence, genuine Christian leadership is, by definition, also moral leadership (Dames 2009). But how can Christian leaders engage with public issues?

Christian leaders need to remember that a secular state is enshrined in the South African Constitution. This means that the organs of government cannot actively promote the interests of a particular religious group. Hence, any religious (or secular) group needs to consider how it can *legitimately* and *constructively* engage in the public space alongside other citizens (Kretzschmar 2012b:27–70). Christians need to provide moral leadership that articulates and embodies

a moral vision of what public service involves, and that exemplifies an ethic of work and so offers a better life for the citizens of South Africa. In this context, Christian leaders within local government may hold high public office, be mayors or act as managers of relatively small departments. Hence it is *legitimate* for Christians to reflect collectively on what is right, to do what is right and to expose wrong actions within the workplace. This is because the purpose of government officials is to perform their duties for the benefit and well-being of the citizens of the country, and not to enrich themselves, their colleagues or their relatives. Christians, and particularly Christian leaders at all levels of local government, are challenged to act according to the tenets of the faith they proclaim. Their engagement within the workplace will be *constructive* if it contributes to the effective and honest administration of local government. Such leaders are able both to experience life and enable others to lead a better life within their communities and society as a whole.

Instead of merely discussing ethics and Christian leadership in the workplace in a purely theoretical manner, I decided to draw on the mass of data contained in the *Consolidated general report on the audit outcomes of local government 2010–11* in South Africa. At the time of writing, this report had recently been made public by the Auditor-General, Terence Nombembe (2012). More recently, police recorded 500 service delivery strikes in the 3 months between mid-November 2013 and mid-February 2014 and have claimed ‘an average of 34 protest incidents a day’. Paton (2014) discusses the political and other reasons for these strikes (such as struggles for political office and tender contracts).

In outline, the paper begins with a brief sketch of the complexities of the South African workplace. Thereafter, the nature of moral evil and its manifestations in the workplace are discussed. The third and fourth sections outline the serious moral deficiencies of local government in South Africa. The article concludes with a discussion of how Christian leaders can act as moral agents in the workplace.

## Setting the scene: The complexities of the South African workplace

The South Africa workplace is complex. It consists of a mixture of good and evil motives and actions that need to be discerned. In the workplace, different understandings of the past, perceptions of the present and scenarios for the future compete with each other in the public space.

Many people in the country wish to move forward and build a nation in which individual contributions are not judged in terms of race; nevertheless, the conflict-ridden racial past of the country cannot be ignored. For instance, the promulgation of the *Natives Land Act* of 1913 a century ago resulted in the long-term land dispossession of black people. Black people were further prevented from exercising political rights (except limited rights within ‘tribal’ land) and given only restricted access to education. They were not permitted to hold mineral

rights within the mining sector or travel freely within the country. The widespread practice of migrant labour, dating back to diamond mining in Kimberley in the mid-19th century, meant that black workers were away from home for most of the year. This was a major cause of family, cultural and social breakdown. In economic terms, low wages were earned, the rural areas were stripped of working men, and black people were not permitted to operate businesses in the 'white' urban areas. A host of discriminatory and brutal laws governed their every step under *apartheid*. These and many other practices not only caused enormous suffering, but resulted in the vast economic inequalities of the present day.

How we ought to understand and deal with this past is vitally important – and contested. Do we study it in order to understand it, and determinedly ameliorate its destructive effects, planning not to repeat its mistakes? Or, do we dwell on the past, stoking the fires of suspicion and hatred? There is a vast difference between these two approaches. It is not possible for me, as a white South African, to have plumbed the depths of rage and despair experienced by black South Africans. But as a woman, I certainly have experienced, and continue to experience, prejudice, marginalisation and aggression. But, whatever one's personal or social experience, two key factors are, I believe, crucial. Firstly, the racial injustices, exploitation, violence, unjust policies and tragedies of previous events ought not to be minimised or disregarded. Secondly, leaders should not allow these realities to determine an equally conflict-ridden future.

A full appreciation of the past is crucial, but should not be an absolute perspective. This is because although race remains an important factor, it is not the only factor that has an impact on the workplace. Culture and the differing values that arise from cultural experiences and expectations are also important (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 2000; Kretschmar 2010; Schubert 2008). Equally, one's economic class significantly influences one's approach to work as the perspectives of those who are wealthy or, at least, take home a good salary, differ from those who earn low wages or who are unemployed. Furthermore, the recent growth of the black middle class and the so-called 'black diamonds' of the new economic and political elite, have had a significant impact on economic relations in South Africa. In addition, the role of gender perceptions and relations in the workplace is a further essential category of analysis. The following situations persist: patriarchy, violence against women and children in the home and elsewhere, girls and women receiving less education, the marginalisation of rural women, and the struggle by women to cope with the demands of home, family and paid employment.

As each day passes, the list of challenges facing South Africans seems to grow longer. Which should be highlighted, matters economic (such as corruption, poverty, unemployment, and wage and asset disparities) or matters political (e.g. the widespread incapacity of government at all levels, power struggles within the African National Congress (ANC) or

competition for votes between the various political parties leading up to the 2014 national elections)? Or, should issues related to race, culture, gender, the frustrations of the youth, or some other issue be emphasised? If we need to focus on all of these, and their impact on one another, how will we manage this complexity and solve our urgent problems? Indeed, how can we agree on which should be considered the most urgent problems and how to reduce them significantly?

The factors noted above, and many others, play a role in life in South Africa, and also in the context of the workplace. But this paper is not primarily concerned with them. The focus here is on the role that moral evil plays in the choices and actions of members of local government which deeply affect their own lives and the lives of others. Manifestations of moral evil cut across all racial, sociocultural and economic categories within South Africa, and they prevent significant economic growth, proper service delivery, the creation of employment opportunities, a marked amelioration of poverty and widespread infrastructural development – in short, the promotion of the common good of the country's people.

## Moral evil

Arguably, the term 'moral evil' encompasses discussions on the cosmic origin of both goodness and evil, the occurrence of the human propensity to do what is wrong, and human sinfulness, that is, individual acts of wrongdoing, self-destructiveness, or harm towards creation and other people. But the origin of evil, the differences between cosmic, physical or moral evil (Sharpe 1909), or what has been termed the 'problem of evil' or theodicy (see Abernethy & Lanford 1968:425–494; Hick 1983:41–56), are not discussed in this article. Rather, the focus of this article is on the practical outworking of human moral evil, or sin, as expressed in the actions of individuals and social groups, especially in the workplace. This outworking is seen in the distortion of human nature, the inner motivations of people, interpersonal relations, social policies, structures, laws and institutions.

When speaking of moral evil, one is drawn into a debate about human nature. Whereas some may regard human beings as essentially good, requiring only improved socialisation, education, legal prescription, effort or positive-reinforcement to improve, this is not a Christian view. While these are important, they are in themselves incapable of restoring the moral nature or capacity of human beings. Over the centuries, theologians have debated the extent to which our human nature is dominated by sin. For instance, Augustine rejected the views of Pelagius (*Confessions* VIII.x.22; Banner 2009:23–41), Calvin (1960) taught on original sin and predestination in his *Institutes of the Christian religion* (3.23.3–14 & 4.15.10–13) and Wesley (1996) wrote his 'A plain account of Christian perfection' (see Wogaman & Strong 1996:175–177). In essence, however, a Christian understanding of human nature is that we are both created in the image of God and are 'fallen' creatures unable to restore ourselves to communion with God or achieve moral purity. Quoting Blaise Pascal ([1670] 1958) (*Pensées*, VII–435),

Hollinger (2002:75) states that an inflated, overly positive view of human moral capacity leads to pride whereas a purely negative view results in despair.

Hollinger (2002:75–77; cf. Peschke 1999:285–325) then embarks on an analysis of Genesis 3, and refers also to other biblical texts, to outline a Christian view of the nature of sin and its effects. Firstly, sin is alienation from God; it is the refusal to recognise that human beings cannot be morally or spiritually autonomous. Secondly, sin results in a separation of human beings from each other because it is rooted in destructive actions and relationships. Thirdly, sin involves the practice of deceit and it damages the self. This is:

the propensity [*of people*] to distort reality and so deceive themselves into believing things that are not the way they really are. Our self-deception attempts to foil truthful accounts of reality about the world, self and others. (Hollinger 2002:77)

The fourth alienation, according to Hollinger (2002:77), is from nature or creation. This description strikingly reflects the teaching of Jesus outlined earlier: alienation from God can only be overcome by entering the 'narrow gate'; people are separated from and destroy each other; human beings are self-deceived; and the effects of sin on society and creation are negative – the 'houses of sand' collapse. As noted below, human sinfulness further influences the societies in which we live, resulting in corporate or structural sin.

Significant though the effects of moral evil may be on society, its power must not be overestimated. Echoing Augustine, the Catholic theologian, Sidney Callahan (1991) states:

Evil must, in reality, always be parasitic on good through some perversion or failure. This dependence arises because good is based upon the reality of our positive human capacities and nature; evil can only be negative in denying, distorting, or perverting what in other circumstances enables good acts. (p. 145; cf. O'Neil 1912)

In Romans chapters 5, 6 and 7 the Apostle Paul explains how human beings can be saved by faith because the work of Christ has conquered sin. The death of Christ has made reconciliation and peace with God possible, and Christ's disciples can now live a life of righteousness or moral integrity in the Spirit. Elsewhere, Paul states that the power of death and of every other ruler has been destroyed (1 Cor 15:1–58), hence Christians armed with truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation can stand against evil (Eph 6:10–20). Jesus put it like this: 'In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!' (Jn 16:33b).

Moral evil is seen in the choices and actions of those who seek to harm or destroy others either at a personal level or through social policies and structures. In addition to those who perform occasional acts of evil, there are those who 'repudiate morality at a fundamental level and commit themselves to evil' (Callahan 1991:145). One result is that the inner self is corrupted. Another is that one's moral perception of other people is affected:

Lying, deceiving, abusing, and manipulating others breeds the conviction that others too must be liars and in their turn out to

manipulate, secretly betray, and attack. Paranoid thinking [*she says*], comes from projecting onto others one's own aggressive characteristics. (*ibid*:146)

A further effect is that others are drawn into this web of evil: such corrupt people often 'draw others to them by their perverse charisma' and demand 'absolute obedience' (Callahan 1991:146). Thus, the effect of moral evil on the self, other individuals and society is very negative, especially in extreme cases of paranoia and megalomania. Rational thinking starts to disappear, facts are disregarded, false or limited perceptions of reality are propagated and truth-tellers are ignored or maligned. Tragically, what is jettisoned is self-critique, a sense of moral obligation, moral reasoning, mature and moral emotions and right actions (Callahan 1991:147).

In applying these insights to the workplace, it is seen that a lack of self-criticism gives rise to limited perceptions of the self, self-deceit and the denial of accountability. Those who acknowledge no moral obligations towards other people will find it easy to lie, manipulate people or information, and slander those colleagues whom they fear may expose their acts of fraud and corruption. Moral evil is expressed in damaging conflicts between members of staff, or between staff and their managers, sexual harassment, racial discrimination and unjust marginalisation. A deficit of moral reasoning will mean that facts will be disregarded, or distorted perceptions of reality will be promoted to prevent either wrong actions or the lack of action from being exposed. If no steps are taken to prevent immoral actions such as these, the perpetrators will become increasingly morally degraded, so that moral conscience and emotions such as compassion will be suppressed. If given the opportunity, persons such as these engage in immoral actions such as theft and corruption. They will fail to act responsibly and perform shoddy work – or no work at all. The result of such moral decline will be to bring about an increasingly dysfunctional society and negatively affect the performance of members of local government departments.

## The Auditor-General's report for the year 2010–2011 for local government

According to the Auditor-General (Nombembe 2012:21), local government is made up of 'eight metros, 46 district municipalities, 229 local municipalities (totalling 283 municipalities) and 60 municipal entities'. Overall, the report showed that only:

five district municipalities, eight local municipalities and four municipal entities received clean audit reports. These auditees represent only 5% of all the auditees in the country. None of the municipalities in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, Northern Cape and North West received clean audit reports. (*ibid*:17)

Only 13 out of 283 municipalities achieved a clean audit report (Nombembe 2012:21). Below, some of the key issues highlighted in this report are mentioned.

## Lack of competence and skill

The report highlights a lack of essential skills, competence, monthly financial statements, accounting records and internal controls (Nombembe 2012:38, 43, 45). It also points to a lack of the competencies of '(i) leadership; (ii) financial and performance management and (iii) governance' (*ibid*:57). Furthermore, there were critical 'supply chain management issues needing attention' (*ibid*:63). The fact that the skills of the appointed staff are not at the required levels is revealed in the following excerpt from the Auditor-General's report:

Of the 343 auditees analysed, 234 (68%) were assisted by consultants [*at a cost of over*] R295 million. ... This excludes amounts spent by the National Treasury, provincial treasuries and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs on consultants assigned to assist municipalities. (*ibid*:35)

This lack of competence was confirmed in the opening remarks by the Auditor-General, who stated, '[o]fficials in key positions at more than 70% of the auditees do not have the minimum competencies and skills required to perform their jobs' (Nombembe 2012:13).

## Overspending, unauthorised spending and material losses

Significant overspending occurred in 'the Northern Cape (86%), Free State (77%) and Eastern Cape (59%)' (Nombembe 2012:54). In addition:

[u]nauthorised, irregular or fruitless and wasteful expenditure was incurred by 86% of auditees. Eighty-four per cent of the auditees did not take reasonable steps to prevent this type of expenditure. Procurement to the value of R3,5 billion could not be audited because the required information or documentation was not made available by auditees. ... [*for*] 46% of auditees, contracts were awarded to employees, councillors or other state officials. Unfair or uncompetitive procurement processes were followed at 65% of the auditees. (*ibid*:8)

High levels of 'unauthorised, irregular as well as fruitless and wasteful expenditure' were reported in 84% of the local governments, 77% submitted financial statements that required material adjustments, and 70% were 'non compliant in terms of procurement and contract management' (Nombembe 2012:47). The report continues:

The biggest contributors to the irregular expenditure were KwaZulu-Natal (R2,1 billion) and the Eastern Cape (R1,4 billion). In terms of prevalence within the province, the Northern Cape is the highest (90% of auditees) followed by the Free State (89%) and Limpopo (83%). (*ibid*:55)

Finally, material losses amounted to the vast sum of R7.7 billion (double the figure of R3.6 bn for the 2009–2010 year), with electricity and water losses accounting for 94% of these material losses (Nombembe 2012:110–111). These are staggering amounts of money – and money that needs to be spent wisely, effectively and urgently to provide essential services and lift the burden of poverty from the lives of millions of people in the country.

Interestingly, Bruce Madlala,<sup>1</sup> writing in the *Sowetan* newspaper (July 2012), responded by saying:

According to the 2010/11 A-G's report, the best-governed province is Western Cape, under the Democratic Alliance. The best metropolitan council is the City of Cape Town, also under the DA. Some of the worst run municipalities, such as Msunduzi in KwaZulu-Natal and Madibeng in North West are also under the control of the ANC. Of the eight provinces under the ANC, it is a struggle to find good governance and a corruption-free leadership that is beyond reproach. In fact, three of the ANC-controlled provinces are under administration in terms of Section 100 of the Constitution. These are Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Free State.

To summarise, according to the figures submitted by local governments themselves, and as audited by the office of the Auditor-General, local government is in complete disarray. So much so that it was reported (Barron 2013:15) that the Consulting Engineers of South Africa (Cesa) are planning to take municipalities to court on charges of corruption. This is because many of Cesa's members apply for government tenders only to find out that the work has been given to individuals or firms that are unqualified to perform the relevant engineering services.

## Moral issues raised by the report

No-one living in South Africa can escape the negative effects of poor service delivery. Every day, millions are confronted with potholes, bad roads, no electricity or incorrect electricity accounts, and tender irregularities. There is a lack of running water, poor sewage infrastructure and refuse is not removed. All of this is exacerbated by the prolonged absence of municipal officials who fail to respond to queries. Individuals, families, workers and businesses are all negatively affected by the partial or complete collapse of service delivery. Because corruption, fraud, lack of service, incompetence, denial, and poor governance negatively affect individuals, families and society as a whole, they can be said to be forms of moral evil. The human dignity of citizens is trampled upon and their needs are ignored. In addition, think of how many jobs could be created, neighbourhoods revitalised, families fed, houses, schools, hospitals and roads built with the billions of rands that have been wasted. Because of wrong actions (such as fraud) and the failure to act rightly, moral evil is perpetuated.

What explanation can be offered for this sorry state of affairs? Drawing on several surveys, Vorster (2012) outlines the following reasons for corruption:

... greed, lack of moral values, insufficient mechanisms to deal with corruption, lacking a legal culture, unskilled and poorly trained officials, ... poverty, and the absence of an adequate moral fibre in the society. (pp. 137–138)

The moral defects that are at the root of these problems are discussed below, namely a deficit of *competence, responsibility,*

1. Madlala is a senior researcher at the Forum for Public Dialogue non-governmental organisation (NGO), of which Moeletshi Mbeki is the Chairperson. He is also a member of the Midrand Group.

*human solidarity, justice and leadership.* It is argued that a perspective based on Christian ethics and leadership can contribute significantly to ascertaining how the problems of local government can be resolved. This is especially necessary because a sizeable proportion of the people employed at all levels by the government are churchgoers, even if they are not all committed and active disciples.

### **A deficit of competence**

We have already seen that 70% of officials lack the necessary skills and competence to perform their duties. In the first place, how were they given posts and, secondly, how do they remain employed following years of non-delivery? The moral failure here is threefold. Firstly, those who authorised these appointments failed to apply valid criteria and thereby abused their positions. Secondly, those who accepted appointments to posts for which they knew they were not qualified showed a lack of honesty and judgement – they ought not to have accepted these positions. Alternatively, once employed, they ought to have taken significant and urgent steps to become competent, or else have resigned from their positions. Thirdly, internal local government controls failed, as no-one acted to remove the officials who were under-performing, who are corrupt, or unqualified, despite the overwhelming evidence in the Auditor-General's reports. Hence, the moral evils of self-deception and systemic denial have been the order of the day.

### **A deficit of responsibility**

In the opening sentences of the report, Terence Nombembe (2012) stated that:

At least 73% of the auditees showed signs of a general lack of consequences for poor performance. This is evidenced by the fact that modified audit opinions remained the norm. When officials and political leaders are not held accountable for their actions, the perception could be created that such behaviour and its results are acceptable and tolerated. (p. 13)

Why is this so?

In a fascinating article, Mnguni (2012) discusses the public service in South Africa in terms of psycho-social dynamics, especially that of 'social defence theory'. It is not enough to examine the factual and explicit, he argues; one must also pay attention to the unconscious and hidden aspects of poor service delivery (*ibid*:3). He argues that South African society is extremely polarised, as a consequence of our past experiences. This encourages 'splitting' – setting off one person or social group from another – and projecting negative characterisations, such as incompetence or racism, onto the other group. According to Burton (2012), splitting:

can be defined as the division or polarization of beliefs, actions, objects, or persons into good and bad by focusing selectively on their positive or negative attributes ... it also reinforces our sense of self as good and virtuous by effectively demonizing all those who do not share in our opinions and values. ... This results in a distorted understanding of reality.

Mnguni's (2012) main findings are that

the deployment of ill-qualified party loyalists to key positions in the public service is perverse: it serves as a collective defense against the impossible aspects of the task at hand. The appointees, in turn, deploy organisational processes to defend against feelings of incompetence and the inevitability of failure. (p. 1)

Because many members of the civil service are ill-equipped to deal with the huge task of service delivery at all levels, they respond with 'anti-task' behaviour (Mnguni 2012:1, 4). In other words, the required work is simply not done.

### **A deficit of human solidarity**

A further defence mechanism is to ensure that only those who are party loyalists and who can be trusted to follow the lead of these 'loyalists' are employed. This limits the number of people who will be willing to draw attention to the failures of local government. This narrow group solidarity protects the interests of a specific group and restricts or prevents its members from being held accountable for the work that has not been performed and for its overspending, or unauthorised spending. Hence, party, group or ethnic loyalty is placed above an ethic of serving the common good which is based on the value of human solidarity that can advance justice and service delivery to all South Africans.

### **A deficit of justice: Damage to those who are capable and honest**

But what of those in the public service who are neither corrupt nor incompetent? Nombembe (2012:13) mentions 'those people that are giving their best under trying circumstances'. In a dysfunctional department, members of all race groups who are honest, fair, dedicated and reliable may be pushed to the side, intimidated or victimised by their dishonest colleagues because they are seen as a threat. This victimised or marginalised group often colludes by remaining silent. Mnguni (2012:8) argues that this group '... tends to be overlooked in public and intellectual discourse. And yet it could very well be the cohort that may hold the key to turning the public service around'. In terms of this article, this is the gap that needs to be exploited by Christians at all levels of local government. Capable and honest members of the civil service may be treated as scapegoats, falsely accused or pushed to the peripheries of the civil service, and they may feel angry, despondent or despairing. However, they have the power to effect real change if they understand that the evils that they confront are not as strong as they appear and that exposure weakens the power of those who have given themselves over to the evil morals of deception, intimidation and graft. In short, the 'houses' of those who perpetrate moral evil are built on sand and will fall down.

### **A deficit of moral leadership; the correct exercise of executive authority**

Terence Nombembe (2012) noted the lack of leadership:

I found that more than half of our auditees can attribute their poor audit outcomes to mayors and councillors that are not

responsive to the issues identified by the audits and do not take our recommendations seriously. They are slow in taking up their responsibilities and do not take ownership of their role in implementing key controls. If this widespread root cause is not addressed, it will continue to weaken the pillars of governance. (p. 13)

In addition to denying that there is a problem, using the defence mechanisms of splitting, anti-task behaviour, employing inept or corrupt colleagues and treating honest colleagues unjustly, senior officials employ the additional mechanism of distraction. The appearance of action deludes onlookers into thinking that the problems are being identified and dealt with via 'expensive but meaningless rituals' (Mnguni 2012:4, 7) such as workshops in plush settings, investigations and consultations. This 'smokescreen' seeks to hide the fact that service delivery is not improving.

Obviously, this situation will not improve if drastic steps are not taken to compel the relevant mayors and councillors to take their responsibilities seriously or else to remove them from office. But, surprisingly, Nombembe's (2012) conclusion was as follows:

In conjunction with the relevant departments, my office has actively participated in providing input into the development of solutions to the challenges highlighted in this report. I believe that all that is needed is the sustained involvement of the leadership in utilising those solutions. (p. 14)

It is true that the Auditor-General does not have the power to remove local government leaders from office. Nevertheless, in my view, his conclusion is unwarranted. This is because little or no evidence exists that previous reports have resulted in significant improvement. As all levels of government are struggling under the burdens of incapacity and corruption, it appears that the majority of current leaders are either unwilling or unable to take action. If governmental leadership (at presidential, national, regional and local levels) is part of the problem, how will such leaders act to solve the deep-seated and serious problems raised in this report?

However, there are signs that not all leaders in the public service are incompetent and/or corrupt and a few organs of local government are operating well. Such leaders and members of their departments need to be encouraged and practical steps taken to implement significant changes in local government. What is required is that existing financial and governance controls be implemented, and that criminal charges be laid against those members of local government who have acted wrongly. To achieve real change those who are proven guilty ought to be jailed and/or dismissed, the money that has been misappropriated or stolen returned, and all benefits of their positions such as salary, pension, medical and housing benefits forfeited. In my view, this would constitute an example of moral, executive leadership, as officials who have defrauded the public would be seen to be held accountable for their actions. Such decisive action could also serve as a useful deterrent.

## Strategies Christian leaders can employ to avoid and expose moral evil

Throughout this paper, it has been noted that Christians are part of the complex world of work. This complexity means that some colleagues will be open to and supportive of a Christian value system. Thus, they will be in favour of honesty, responsibility, accountability, fairness and the like. Some may be indifferent to matters of faith, or even actively opposed to all religion, but may nevertheless subscribe to these values, once stripped of their religious framework.<sup>2</sup> When they find expression in actions, values such as these can contribute enormously to the common good and the world of work, also within a secular state. Those who act morally avoid doing what is wrong. They further refuse to collude with those individuals or groups who conspire to divert public money for their own use, or that of their co-conspirators and family members. Given the number of Christians in the country, at least some Christians work in the local government sector. In what ways can they be encouraged and enabled to be moral agents (Kretzschmar 2012a:138–146)?

### A deeper relationship with God

Christians who are seeking to grow spiritually so as to be enabled to practice fairness, compassion, truthfulness and courage, for instance, need to know in the deepest recesses of their being that they belong to God and that God loves them. This is especially true for those who are determined to stand for what is true and right in a work environment in which deceit, corruption and intimidation are prominent features. The more difficult the circumstances within the workplace, the deeper the Christian's relationship to God needs to grow. Those who are uncertain of their faith, or that God deeply loves them, may not be able to exercise moral courage, or be capable of facing the reactions they may evoke. All possible practical means of spiritual and communal support need to be drawn upon, including prayer, the study of the Bible, silent meditation, fasting, communal worship, small group fellowships, times of retreat, genuine friendships, spiritual direction and support from one's family and honest colleagues (Culligan 1983; Johnson 1989; Leech 1980; Mulholland 1993).

### Develop and exercise moral discernment

As noted earlier, the pursuit of what is true, right and good requires a nuanced understanding of sin or moral evil and its practical outworking. Because moral evil is characterised by deception and self-deceit, Christian leaders need to foster the growth of moral discernment. Moral discernment can be understood to include one's possessing a clear perception of reality, sensitivity to hidden motives, an ability to discriminate between what is true and what is false, and an awareness

<sup>2</sup>Throughout the third King Report on Corporate Governance (2009) reference is made to values such as responsibility, accountability, fairness and transparency. But the religious roots of these values, many of which are drawn from the Judeo-Christian tradition, are not mentioned.

of moral evil (no matter how well it is disguised). Moral discernment and fair judgement develop through the growth of cognitive ethical competence (knowledge and insight) and emotional maturity. What needs to grow is an understanding of what is morally obligatory and how to promote actions that will result in good service delivery. Further, those who grow in moral discernment will increasingly learn to identify moral (or immoral) motives and character in themselves and others.

### Grow in the ability to act responsibly

Rather than practising deceit, denial, intimidation and theft, Christians in the civil service need to perform their work in a dedicated and responsible manner. To be responsible, according to Frankena (1973:71–78) means to be morally responsible (character), perform required actions (do what is required in the place of work) and to exercise good judgement when one is in a position of authority over others (e.g. when holding an official position). To act responsibly one needs the ability, power and opportunity to act (Kessler 2010:527–550). One also needs to act freely in the service of what is right and good, that is to say, not to act because of fear or intimidation. Responsibility further leads to accountability, namely that one is able to explain one's actions satisfactorily. Thus, Christians can provide moral leadership by exposing wrong actions and providing an example of responsible behaviour.

Ogletree (2004:36) argues that moral agency includes '(1) a primal disposition to live a moral life; (2) the capacity to act morally; and (3) sound moral judgment'. Moral discernment and the capacity to act responsibly have already been discussed. The disposition to live a moral life depends on the human moral will being redeemed so that it can choose to obey God and thereby find life. Hence, mature character and a moral lifestyle ought to be essential aspects of a Christian leader's make-up. These are discussed at length in many letters of the New Testament, where the early Christians were instructed on who to emulate and how to behave within the churches and in society (e.g. 2 Cor 13:1–10; Gl 6:1–10; Eph 4:25–32; Col 4:5–6; 1 Tm 6:3–19; and 3 Jn 9–12). However, the choices that some in the public service make to deny the rights of others, ignore or distort reality, commit acts of fraud or corruption, practice denial and act on the basis of fear rather than moral principle are all examples of a lack of moral agency. It is also important to point out that those who engage in the immoral behaviour outlined in this article are very vulnerable; they ought to be resisted, not feared. If exposed, they will have no defence to offer. Those Christians who find the moral courage to resist acting in immoral ways in the workplace and who insist on honesty and accountability will serve both their local government and the communities that depend on their service delivery.

### Act in the cause of human solidarity

A study of the history of the Christian church reveals how difficult believers find it to resist greed (Kessler 2012:539–540) and the promotion of narrow group interests such as

imperialism, nepotism, cronyism and racism. Nevertheless, Christians are expected to love their neighbour (Mk 12:28–34) and move beyond the restricted loyalties of ethnicity, social class and gender (Gl 3:27–29). In a context in which incompetence, 'anti-work' behaviour and corruption flourish, Christians can offer ethical leadership and act alongside others who wish to see the public service be *service orientated*. Possible actions include reporting wrongdoing to an appropriate manager, the internal whistle-blowing office (if there is one), the newspapers, *Corruption Watch* (n.d.) and the office of the Public Protector. There are also groups, such as those involved in the *Unashamedly Ethical* (n.d.) campaign that seek to promote 'ethics, values and clean living' that can provide assistance to Christians who seek to expose wrongdoing. Christian leadership that is based on evidence and clear reasoning, and exercised with integrity in a wise and discerning manner, is definitely needed in local government. Those who expose wrongdoing are likely to experience some negative consequences, since those engaged in 'anti-work' behaviour, intimidation or corruption will resist being exposed. Those who are angry with God, themselves and the world, or are greedy, insecure and lack personal honesty, will seek to malign or destroy those who expose them. Nevertheless, by themselves acting morally and insisting that others perform their work diligently, Christian leaders within government can provide an example of how to serve the needs of those who depend on the services of local government.

## Conclusion

Moral evil or sin begins with alienation from God, leads to self-deceit and results in destructive actions in social relationships and towards creation. Evil perverts and distorts what is good. If unchecked, it can result in the progressive corruption of people and, as we have seen, the widespread dysfunction of local government.

Moral evil flourishes within the local government sector by initiating and feeding on falsehood, self-deceit, and misinformation, the intimidation of people, widespread corruption, fraud, and 'anti-work' behaviour. Vastly significant overspending, unauthorised spending and material losses are well documented in the Auditor-General's report for the 2010–2011 year. Incompetence, irresponsibility, a marked lack of concern for the well-being of others, the deliberate marginalisation and intimidation of those who are honest and dedicated, and the failure of those in positions of authority to exercise their power in a fair and correct manner are the principal moral defects identified in this article. All of this has an extremely negative impact on the country and its people. Indeed, the frustration of many millions of people can be seen in the widespread service delivery protests.

However, precisely because evil is parasitic and perverted, it carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Those who perpetrate acts of moral evil are vulnerable to being exposed by those who seek to live as God's children in the complex world of work. Christian leadership can be



exercised in local government if Christians draw on an ever-deepening relationship with God to overcome their own moral deficiencies and develop moral discernment. This will enable them to detect wrong motives and actions on the part of others, even when cleverly disguised. When Christians at different levels of local government provide moral leadership by performing their duties well, serving the public good and exposing wrongdoing, they can indeed make a difference.

In the introduction of this article, reference was made to Jesus' discussion of Christian discipleship in chapter 7 of Matthew's gospel. This means that Christian disciples in local government whether they are in a senior leadership position or not, need to choose the path that, though difficult, leads to life. This is because Jesus said:

... and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Mt 10:38–39)

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I declare that I have no significant competing financial, professional or personal interests that might have influenced the performance of the work described in this manuscript.

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