AOSIS

The Church in the context of corruption: A case of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

CrossMark
click for updates

Authors:
Shelton Mafohla[1]
Macloud Sipeyiye[2,3]

Affiliations:
[1]Church Of Christ in Zimbabwe, Gweru, Zimbabwe

[2]Research Institute for Theology and Religion (RITR), College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

[3]Department of Religious Studies & Ethics, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Midlands State University (MSU), Zvishavane, Zimbabwe

Corresponding author:
Macloud Sipeyiye,
macloudsipeyiye5@gmail.com

Corruption has caused serious dysfunction in most of the public institutions in Zimbabwe. The effectiveness of public institutions on providing meaningful services today hinges upon the capacity of the Church and other social institutions to combat corruption. Regrettably, corruption has infected and affected both the Church and the secular institutions. This theoretical qualitative study explores the potential of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ) in curbing corruption in Zimbabwe. It employs a combination of the Christological kenosis and *Ubuntu* or *Hunhu* as its theoretical lenses. The article argues that the Church has great potential to tackle corruption. The potential of the COCZ manifests in its organisation and public engagement. The restorative nature of the COCZ Restoration Movement (RM) magnifies scripture, the gospel of Christ (Christological kenosis) as a tool of conviction and behaviour change in public spaces to combat corruption. These unique attributes of the COCZ provide the rationale for choosing it as a case study in this article. The data were collected through the engagement with literature largely from the Zimbabwean scholars on the subject and the COCZ documents. The findings were that the COCZ can only unlock its potential if it is committed to taking a self-introspection and reconfigure itself in order to take a robust anti-corruption stance.

Contribution: The study poses questions about the potential of the Church's voice, through the case of the COCZ, in the context of corruption in Zimbabwe. It pushes for the Church to reclaim its authentic status in order to root out corruption and have relevance in the Zimbabwean communities' lived experiences. Religion has always claimed higher ground in ethical and moral issues, but there is scanty literature on the COCZ's role in combating corruption in Zimbabwe. The study maintains that the Church has a consequential opportunity to either drive the agenda to end corruption or lose relevance due to perceived complicit attitudes towards the same.

Keywords: Church; Christological kenosis; corruption; desk-research; governance; kleptocracy; SDGs; Ubuntu; Hunhu.

Introduction

The study explores the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe's (COCZ) principles and tenets of Ubuntu or Hunhu in the context of the discourse of corruption in Zimbabwe. The need to mobilise all energies against corruption comes at a time when Zimbabwe is battling to achieve its Vision 2030, which is guided by the seventeen United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). These SDGs are categorised into five clusters namely people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. This study focuses on the cluster of peace with an interest in the SDG number 16 which stipulates growth in Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Corruption is one of the strongest impediments to sustainable development. Religious institutions, such as the Church, do affect the building of other social institutions. The Church's moral and spiritual campus makes it one of the institutions to reckon with in pursuit of sustainable development, and subsequent achievement of the sustainable development goals (Chitando 2020). However, with over 80% of Zimbabwe's population professing to belong to various Christian churches, many stakeholders are now asking whether the churches are ready and able to stand by their Christian values to curb corruption (Zakeyo n.d.). Both government and religious institutions are fingered in corruption. Zimbabwe's dream of achieving its Vision 2030 risks the hurdles of perennial challenges related to macroeconomic instability and structural rigidities characterised by weak institutions, corruption and rent-seeking behaviour (NDS1 2020). To get rid of corruption, there is a need for a restorative process of the country's constitutional values. These are values of transparency, equality, freedom, fairness, honesty and the dignity of hard work (Government of Zimbabwe 2013). The National

Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) document does not address the restoration of value principles in the building of government institutions which are marred by greed, tribalism and nepotism. The COCZ is strategically placed to influence the restoration of the constitutional values that are key in the fight against corruption. We are making this argument because the COCZ's kenotic theology and its synergies with ubuntu have great potential in combating corruption. The article looks at the deep-seated causes of corruption in Zimbabwe and the potential of the COCZ's conception of the model of Christ (Christological kenosis) and its synergies with ubuntu in the transformation and renewal of the society.

Background

Corruption is rottenness within the core ethical and moral nerves of society that results in selfish ambitions and gains. When it happens on a large scale, it destroys societies and their institutions, countries, regions and subsequently the whole world. Peace, justice and strong institutions cannot be achieved without the fight against corruption. As noted by Mpofu (2015:68), 'the greatest challenge today, for the Church in Zimbabwe, is how to be relevant and authentic in a broken society characterized by conflict, corruption, selfishness, fear, and despair…' The 2020 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) conducted by Transparency International (TI), a worldwide organisation that tracks corruption, paints a grim picture of corruption throughout the world (Transparency International [TI CPI] 2020). According to the CPI (TI CPI 2020), the global highlights indicate that 'the highest performing region is Western Europe and European Union with 60/100, whilst the sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest scoring region with 32/100'. Zimbabwe has one of the lowest scorings per country-to-country scale within the region together with Zambia and Malawi being amongst the notable decliners. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic unearthed the deep-seated rot that corruption had caused in Zimbabwe. Sande (2017:1) notes that the post-independent Zimbabwe is characterised by bad vices of economic decline, poor accountability, laxity of the rule of law and corruption. This has caused Zimbabwe to slide from the prestigious position of being the breadbasket of Africa to becoming one of the basket cases of Africa (Gunda 2018). Zimbabwe is hugely religious, and religion plays a pivotal role in politics, governance and socio-economic spheres (Muchechetere 2009). The Preamble to the constitution recognises the supremacy of God and celebrates the vibrancy of our traditions and cultures (Government of Zimbabwe 2013:15). The government of Zimbabwe recently announced the need for partnership between itself and private institutions (PPP) for development. This milestone provides the opportunity for mobilising restorative strategies enshrined in religion and culture to appeal to the inner beings of individuals and society to change corrupt lifestyles.

Defining corruption

Although the term corruption is very strenuous to define, in this article, we understand it as the intrinsic rottenness of moral values that exacerbate selfish ambitions and selfish gains. Muzurura (2019:105) defines corruption 'as the willful abuse or misuse of public office or public property for personal or corporate gain'. This happens when formal rules and regulations are overtly, or covertly, manipulated for pecuniary motives or other considerations that frustrate good public intentions (Muzurura 2019). The biblically based Christian theological perspective goes beyond the understanding of corruption given in this article. The word 'corrupt' is derived from the Old Testament Hebrew 'chânêph' or 'khaw-nafe', which means 'to soil, especially in a moral sense, to defile, pollute, or profane' (e-Sword Bible KJV, H2610). The Greek New Testament has two equivalent terms. These are 'diastrephō' and 'diaphtheirō' which entail 'to distort, misinterpret, turn away or pervert, rot thoroughly, adulterate or make worthless' (e-Sword Bible KJV, G1294). This implies that corruption destroys the good values and principles that are meant to build a better and sustainable society. The Christian theological perspective explores the deepest levels of that which informs human beings to act in a corrupt manner. When the social, economic, political and religious operational systems within a community become indifferent to anti-corruption, the rot will be realised at a fundamental level. The term 'corrupt' features for the first time in Genesis 6 where God had taken an audit on human beings, and discovered that they were 'corrupt'. God's people had wandered off from being good and holy to becoming bad and corrupt (Gn 6:11). God responded by wiping all the people except Noah and his family. The term is also defined through the way God bestowed on Israel the responsibility of exemplifying goodness and righteousness, guarding against any pollutions especially those that came from the non-Israelites (Dt 4:16, 25; 31:29). God did not employ a radical route of destroying the whole world, rather, he selected others who would set an example in refusing and resisting corruption.

Theoretical frameworks

The study employs a combination of the African principle of *Ubuntu,* and the practical Christological *Kenosis* with a view to integrating the two approaches for relevance in an African context characterised by religious hybridity. Corruption in Zimbabwe has become so cancerous that it requires grassroots concepts that guide the restorative agenda (Manyoganise 2020). The ancient Greek word 'kenosis' means 'self-emptying'. It is an English derivative of the Greek term *kenos* meaning 'empty or purge' or from the Greek verb kenóō meaning to self-empty' (Hayden 2009). The kenotic theory arises from the interpretation of Philippians 2:5–8, where Paul uses Christ's incarnation as a model in addressing the problems of self-centredness, division and selfishness in the Philippian Christian community. The term 'kenosis' is used in practical theology to inspire Christ-like attitudes in public spaces. Jere (2018:3) avers that 'Kenosis is what makes incarnation and salvation true and without which the entire Christian faith is dead'. Corruption is a manifestation of a lack of self-emptying; thus, the kenotic approach is indispensable in this study that seeks to explore how the

church in Zimbabwe can become a successful institution in combating corruption. Ubuntu or Hunhu reflects the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interest of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Chisale 2018). It is generally believed that in pre-colonial African societies, the concept of Ubuntu or Hunhu was instrumental in sustaining social cohesion, and managing peace and order for the good life of everyone in the society, including strangers and passersby. The agenda of combating corruption in Africa is expected to make notable strides as we use African solutions to African problems. As such, the ubuntu philosophy informs this study as it seeks ways to build a cultural evaluative base to situate and confront issues of corruption in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

The study is a theoretical qualitative enquiry that employed the desk research approach. The researchers interacted with relevant sources on the subject of the Church and corruption in Zimbabwe without involving a field survey. They essentially relied on the review of available literature. The rationale for the choice of the approach was based on the fact that the church has always responded to crises of various dimensions including ethical and moral issues affecting individuals, institutions and society at large (Chitando 2020). The research is therefore intended to challenge and awaken the sleeping giant so that it swings into action by amplifying the available cardinal theological principles of the Church, using the COCZ, that can be tapped into in remedying the cancer of corruption that threatens to make all institutions in Zimbabwe dysfunctional. The choice of the COCZ was motivated by its comprehensive Christological kenosis that makes a neat synergy with Hbuntu or Hunhu forming a combination that can offer a new beginning to failed humanity.

The deep-seated causes of corruption in Zimbabwe

There emerged from the reviewed literature numerous critical factors for the cause of corruption in Zimbabwe. There are three recent reports on corruption in Zimbabwe released by three distinct organisations, namely: The CPI (2020) report carried out by Transparency International, The Sentry (March 2021) report and The Maverick Citizen (2021) report. All the three reports reveal that corruption has grown to alarming levels on all levels of life and from top levels of government to the lowest levels of Zimbabwean societies. The study found out that there are political, economic, social, psychological and theological or religious causes of corruption in Zimbabwe that have a historical base that has grown over the years. All five areas are interconnected and affect each other.

Political causes: Democracy or kleptocracy?

The toxic political environment of Zimbabwe is the main cause and driver of corruption. The late former Zimbabwe's Vice President Joshua Nkomo started to renounce corruption during the country's early years of independence. He made a famous statement on 12 April 1986 that:

> 'What Zimbabwe fought for was peace, progress, love, respect, justice, equality, not the opposite. And one of the worst evils we see today is corruption. The country bleeds today because of corruption.' (Mataire 2021).

Although some scholars argue that things started to fall apart for Zimbabwe way before independence (Makina 2014), others hold that the sharp decline of the situation because of corruption took shape soon after independence and continued up to date. Chitando (2002:2) notes that, in 1988, the 'University of Zimbabwe students staged a massive anti-corruption demonstration where they accused the ruling party officials of lining their pockets amidst increased poverty'. The triggering moment was the illegal resale of automobile purchases by various government officials, commonly known as the Willogate scandal.

The rot continued, with a brief halt during the Government of National Unity (GNU), formed between ZANU-PF and MDC. The Global Agreement was crafted to respond to the disputed elections that were alleged to have been fraudulently conducted to favour ZANU-PF. This allegation on its own is an indication of corruption. The pact lasted until 2013 when it was dissolved following the elections in the same year that gave Mugabe and his party the mandate to rule. In 2018, Mnangagwa succeeded Mugabe when he won a disputed election, and apparently, the crisis still lingers (Chimuka & Chitando 2020). This period exposed kleptocratic practices where governments and political authorities renege and thwart policies that foster economic growth and development when personal interests are at stake (Okafor, Smith & Ujah 2014). The Church in *The Zimbabwe We Want* Document echoed the same that 'national State structures, institutions, and processes have been politicised along party-political lines to the extent of undermining their public and national character'. Corruption runs within all government departments to the extent that it becomes difficult to tell whether Zimbabwe is a democracy or a kleptocracy (Magaisa 2021). A kleptocracy government is a type of government in which 'those in authority exploit national resources and wealth for their personal gain by instituting policies that favor personal interests, not national interests' (Okafor et al. 2014:1). Kleptocracy in Zimbabwean politics is the breeding ground for all other forms of corruption. Most government institutions, for example, the police, army, mining and financial departments have parallel structures that benefit politically exposed persons. The highlighting case is the disappearance, amongst others, of approximately US\$15 billion from the diamond mining activities in Manicaland Province. The kleptocracy undermines the building of peace, justice and strong institutions in the country (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya 2020). Weak institutions exacerbate corruption. The implication is that corruption grows from the top downwards.

Economic causes

Makina (2014) locates the origins of Zimbabwe's economic problems way before independence, during the 1960s, but stresses the events of 14 November 1997 as the beginning of a major economic crisis in the country. This was the day when the Zimbabwean dollar spectacularly collapsed under the weight of fiscal indiscipline and bad policies. Gunda (2018) echoes that there has been no political will to investigate and possibly arrest some prominent personalities fingered in corruption. The introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1991, even before the collapse of the Zimbabwe dollar in 1997, brought about massive suffering for the most vulnerable sections of the population (Chitando 2002) leading to a massive exodus of people to neighbouring countries and the diaspora to find greener pastures. The 2019 AG's report reveals the looting and exploitation of public resources at an industrial scale by the ruling elite. It revealed that most, if not all, line ministries and government departments had no proper financial disbursement documents. For example, the Ministry of Health and Child Care did not avail supporting documents for payments worth US$2 911 172, the Ministry of Infrastructure Development – $657 500 000 and the Ministry of Home Affairs – $170 552 (AG Report 2019:vi).

Psycho-social causes

The political and economic crisis triggered the disjointed social setup within communities of Zimbabwe. Chimuka (2020) posits that the political side of the crisis has left other people homeless, maimed or even traumatised and the economic side of the crisis has left most of the people jobless, with unemployment rates estimated at 85%. Zimbabwe has a history of continued unfair distribution of resources because of unaddressed inequalities. As observed, 'the resultant effect of the crisis is the marginalization of a host of people - the poor, the disabled, the weak, women, children and the elderly' (Chimuka & Togarasei 2020). The majority of the people in top leadership positions acknowledge that corruption is the main cause of suffering in Zimbabwe, yet, corruption is flourishing in those ministries and public institutions. From a psycho-social perspective, the political, socio-economic and religious atmosphere in Zimbabwe has produced cracked citizens. Zimbabwe is, therefore, a cracked nation, a country of the wounded (Chimuka 2020). This is not only true now, because of political violence in every election time, but also true during the past liberation wars. The behaviour of most liberation war veterans is testimony to psychologically cracked individuals whose approach to national development is selfish and non-progressive. Most veterans are filled with hate because of the traumatic experiences they encountered during the war (Magaisa 2021). To make matters worse, not much has been done for most of them to go through therapy to allow healing from those experiences. These individuals went on to take over key government positions and the majority are affiliated with the ruling ZANU PF party. The demand for payment and compensation, with each veteran receiving 50 000

Zimbabwean dollars (about US$8000 at the rate of 1:6 at the time), and the violent land grabs dubbed 'the third chimurenga' shocked the economy to a comatose (Chitando 2002). The political, socio-economic and religious experiences of the general citizenry of Zimbabwe have created a certain mindset that has fueled corruption over the years. The citizens trust their government leaders and the policies they create less and less. The Afro Barometer Report (2021:n.p.) mentions that 'considerably more Zimbabweans trust NGOs (79%) and religious leaders (78%) than they trust the president (48%), members of Parliament (44%) or the police (38%)'.

Theological or religious causes

The changes in the character of Christianity in Africa have been a cause for concern. The argument that in Africa religion is becoming a social problem rather than a solution to people's problems (Dube & Nkoane 2018) cannot be trivialised. The rise of the self-proclaimed prophets within the New Religious Movements (NRMs) and their expansion have exposed the ordinary African Christian to vehement non-orthodox practices and teachings (Gunda 2018). The socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe has also shaken the Church to its core. Firstly, politicians have infiltrated the Church in search of approval and support mostly during elections and if there is any resistance, politicians use the divide-and-rule tactic to form favourable associations. They have done so through corruption as they offer money and land to Church leaders and bishops (Magaisa 2021). This has resulted in many churches losing their prophetic voices. The Church in Zimbabwe struggles to tell the truth to those in positions of power because it has partaken in corrupt practices. The voice that is used to advocate social justice is being neutralised daily. A few have remained resolute amongst the Mainline Churches under the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) from which the COCZ recognises itself as a founding member and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop Conference (ZCBC) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). The ZCC, a body of Mainline Churches including COCZ, through its Local Ecumenical Fellowships (LEFs) that include the clergy, women, men and youth fellowships, facilitates conversations of hope that addresses various issues of social injustices, including the fight against corruption.

Secondly, as many industries folded, Christianity has become one of the most thriving 'business opportunities' for some Zimbabweans (Gunda 2018). The last couple of decades have witnessed the rise of the so-called 'Gospelneuership'. This is a euphemism for the practices that may point to corruption within the popular mega-churches and self-styled prophets. This situation has resulted in many of these prophets amassing a lot of riches equivalent to that of the looting politicians and in the same way own ill-gotten wealth. The cheap 'receive it' gospel theatrics has robbed the young Christians of the values of honesty and hard work to the point that some youths detest looking for jobs. The Zimbabwean young adult population is the majority of those

involved in low- and middle-level corruption (Gunda 2018). The report on the government farm mechanisation programme conducted in 2007 exposed the rot that spanned from the public to the private sector with top politicians, senior judges, private citizens and the church involved (Magaisa 2021). The report awakened both the general citizenry and the ordinary church members to the fact that their leaders were complicit with the corrupt political elites.

Potential of the aspects of Church of Christ in Zimbabwe's kenotic theology and Ubuntu or Hunhu in curbing corruption

The COCZ is an enjoinment of the Christian Churches, Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ that emanated from the United States of America, and spread to the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Africa. In Zimbabwe, the names Churches of Christ and Christian Churches have been merged together through the new constitution for what is now the COCZ (Masengwe 2021). The Church of Christ missionaries that came to Zimbabwe were professionals, in health, education and agriculture, and they championed development in the country, starting with the rural areas of Zvishavane reserves and the Matsai Tribal Trust Lands. The COCZ emanates from the 19th-century American restorationist movement that sought for the Church to restore itself to the New Testament practices. This movement began out of a commitment to biblical authority and church unity (McKim 1996). It was to complete the work that the reformation, led by Martin Luther and others, had started. Noll (2002) says the 'Restorationist Movement' (RM) began with the activities of individual preachers who became disenchanted with the denominational groups to which they belonged and their religious formalism. They regarded the denominational divisions of the Church as man-made and called for the restoration of the New Testament Church (Hughes & Roberts 2001). The core teachings of the COCZ, as adopted from the RM, include a return to the bare facts of the Bible, Christian unity, eradication of human creeds, commitment to lay leadership and a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper (communion).

Kenosis in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

The COCZ recognises the need for a rebuilding and mending of the ethical values through the gospel of Christ as the starting point in the efforts to curb corruption. This agenda is anchored on the COCZ's cardinal kenotic principles that assert the building and promotion of the well-being of humanity. These principles include the priesthood of all believers, Godliness with commitment, koinonia-fellowship, work of service and Christian unity.

The priesthood of all believers

The priesthood of all believers is one of the core principles of leadership in the COCZ. It defines the responsibility of each Christian to lead themselves and others to follow the

practical example of Christ who is the high priest. Church leadership in the COCZ is assumed as an opportunity to serve, rather than as a position of power. The priesthood of all believers is a set example of social responsibilities. It fosters a wider participation of the general public in issues and widens transparency and accountability. It also wards off the corrupt monopolies of the elites in leadership by promoting a sound social contract that confers responsibility on the majority. Oftentimes, the majority entrust their responsibilities to a few in public administration, which result in disappointment characterised by corruption and poor service delivery. The principle promotes the spirit of volunteerism and taking responsibility at a personal level. It neutralises the 'high tables' (Church VIPs) and puts everyone at a levelled pedestal to allow for mutual accountability and fair distribution of resources. Christological kenosis means that 'when Christ is accepted as a human being, there is no need for anyone, especially Christian leaders, to be placed on pedestals' (Mdingi 2020:2). The full and adequate representation of God in Christ means that God expects humans to follow the fragile, biological, social, political and existential humanity of Christ (Mdingi 2020). The fleshiness of God in the person of Christ should not only refer to Christology but also imply a serious responsibility to all living flesh. It gears up human beings to the full expression of humanity, rooted in the self and others.

Godliness with contentment and koinonia (fellowship)

The nature and character of a faithful Church is measured by its Godliness. Godliness deplores corrupt tendencies in strongest terms. One of the key ingredients of godliness is contentment as a commitment of liberty, satisfaction and expression to work for oneself. It teaches industriousness instead of laziness that builds to greediness. It is a call to emulate the character of Christ's meekness, that in denying himself the divine privileges, he worked hard to please the Father in order to achieve the mammoth task of becoming a sacrifice for all humanity. The term 'koinonia' is a Greek word used in the New Testament (NT) to describe the fellowship amongst believers in the Early Church. The NT fellowship has two ingredients: participation and contribution. At the heart of the COCZ is the participation of each individual Christian in the church and nation-building. It believes that basic spiritual fellowship culminates in community and nation-building. A strong Church has strong families and communities. Strong families are built from the healthy participation of their members. Resultantly, this creates a strong nation built on basic relational principles. People who are involved in corrupt activities are part of the communities. They are the fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers and the aunties and uncles of the same communities that we all live in. The application of healthy *koinonia* principles bridges the gap between life at home, church and public places.

Works of service

The aspect of volunteerism is best seen within the aspect of upholding works that seek to serve everyone. Service, derived from the Greek word *'diakonia'*, also used to refer to the office of 'deacon' in the NT and the Early Church, is the ability to volunteer oneself to offer physical assistance to someone in need. Volunteerism manifests as a form of self-limitation, in giving one's time and effort for others. This self-restriction is practical in form, informing ethical and selfless behaviour before time; 'a behaviour that is inherited in space and time, with humans, as the agents of selflessness and humility' (Mdingi 2020:3). Acts of service that emanate from selflessness are key to combating corruption. They build solid characters that are capable of thwarting those who offer bribes as a way of taking advantage. Commitment to this principle by communities and nations would result in the grooming of leaders whose characters make them hate corruption that makes them to sell-out on the African dream.

Christian unity

The COCZ is a non-denominational fellowship of Christians. The Restorationist Movement regarded denominationalism as a deviation from the 'ancient gospel' and a 'unity' of the Church. Thus, it calls for restoration. The call to unity envisions a Church that is not easily divided by denominational differences when engaging the public but one that creates a composite front through the leadership of Christ. Manyoganise (2020) calls for the collaborative efforts by the three Christian bodies, the ZCC (to which COCZ is a founder member), ZCBC and EFZ to prioritise on combating corruption in Zimbabwe. The three ecumenical bodies achieved several milestones since their formation in the 1960s. However, Chitando and Manyoganise (2020:47) note that 'while the different Church bodies have come together regularly in response to the Zimbabwean crisis, the level of ecumenical sharing and partnership still leaves a lot to be desired'. Oftentimes, certain political establishments gain perpetuation of corrupt activities when the voice of the ecumenical bodies is weakened because of the 'want' to maintain a visible identity as individual organisations (Manyoganise 2020). The COCZ perceives the need for a continual investment in Christian unity in public spaces.

Ubuntu or Hunhu in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

There are high levels of corruption in Zimbabwe that epitomise the lack of compassion, humanity, dignity and mutuality in maintaining a nation-state with justice and mutual caring. The construction of a contextually relevant gospel in the COCZ has been influenced by a move to indigenise the Church. Jirrie's (1972:10) 'How to Uproot Church Problems' challenges the 'Africans … to take up leadership in order to wean the African Church from its Western tutelage into a fully-fledged African Church'. He rallied for the merging of the Church principles to the African philosophical framework of Ubuntu or Hunhu. Hunhu is a Shona term that refers to good ethical human

behaviour or conduct. Ubuntu (from the Zulu language of Southern Africa that means 'being human' or 'to be human') is based on the adage that 'I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti 1990:106). It is a philosophy that is concerned with the reinforcement of unity, oneness and solidarity amongst the Bantu (human beings) people of Africa in general and southern Africa in particular (Konyana 2013). It is described as the intrinsic capacity of the African communal principle of expressing compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Konyana 2013). It places emphasis on the community and taking responsibility for each other's burdens. This thrust of Ubuntu motivates the drive towards upholding communal values rather than individual gratification and actions that look at the care of others rather than selfishness. The value of Ubuntu or Hunhu has also found space within African redemptive theologies. The church's earlier conception of the gospel reflected a faith that was more Eurocentric than African. The practicability of African existentialism puts Ubuntu or Hunhu on the pedestal of the restoration agenda. The adoption of capitalistic individuality of Western ideologies has created a new crop of thieves and looters in Africa, in the name of investment and development. The combination of kenosis and Ubuntu or Hunhu are effective tools for the church in the fight against corruption. They are restorative and regenerative tools that allow communities to reimagine their lost values to build stronger institutions. African Christian communities are challenged to manifest both the values demonstrated by Christ and those values of the African communities embedded in the African principle of ubuntu.

Conclusion

The ensuing discussion has endeavoured to show the deep-rootedness of corruption in Zimbabwe. It has also demonstrated the potential of the committed application of a combination of the COCZ's kenotic Christological principles and the tenets of Ubuntu or Hunhu in remedying the problem. The approach is unique as it seeks to go back to the drawing board to mend human failure. As Greenleaf (1970) asserts:

> [T]he urgent problem of our day - the disposition to venture into the immoral and senseless wars, corruption, destruction of the environment, poverty, alienation - is here because of human failure, individual failure, one individual at a time and one action at a time failures.

The combination of the COCZ's restorationist approach anchored on the kenotic Christological ethics, and the tenets of Ubuntu or Hunhu are critical in driving the restoration of the needed values in the quest to combat corruption in the country. Corruption is an ethical or moral issue that requires a recalibration of conscience to bring it to an end. The restoration agenda has to embark on a reverse action that should ordinarily take one individual at a time making one good decision at a time to combat corruption.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

Authors' contributions

Ethical considerations

Funding information

Data availability

Disclaimer

References

Auditor General Report, 2019, *Financial year ended Dec 31, 2018 on state enterprises & Parastatals*, Office of the Auditor-General Zimbabwe, Harare.

Chimuka, T.A., 2020, 'Religion and development in Sub-Saharan Africa understanding the challenges and prospects', in E. Chitando, M.R. Gunda & L. Togarasei (eds.), *Religion and development in Africa*, BiAS, pp. 75–88, University of Bamberg Press, Bamberg.

Chimuka, T.A. & Togarasei, L., 2020, 'Religion and socio-political marginalization during zimbabwe's crisis decade: An investigation', in L. Togarasei, D. Bishau & E. Chitando (eds.), *Religion and social marginalization In Zimbabwe*, BiAS, pp. 19–30, University of Bamberg Press, Bamberg.

Chisale, S., 2018, 'Ubuntu as care: Deconstructing the gendered Ubuntu', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39(1), a1790. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1790

Chitando, E., 2002, '"Down with the devil and forward with Christ": A study of the interface between religion and political discourses in Zimbabwe', *African Sociological Review* 6(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.4314/asr.v6i1.23200

Dube, B. & Nkoane, M.M., 2018, 'The interface of politics and religion in Zimbabwe: Rethinking religious leaders as agents of consecration and repudiation', *Alteration Special Edition* 23, 224–243. https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2018/sp23a10

Government of Zimbabwe, 2013, *Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 (2013) Act*, Government Printer, Harare.

Greenleaf, R.K., 1970, *Servant leadership*, Berret Koehler Publishers, Inc, San Francisco, CA.

Gunda, M.R., 2018, *At the crossroads: A call to Christians to act in faith for an alternative Zimbabwe*, University of Bamberg Press, Bamberg.

Hayden, D., 2009, *Kenosis in action: Message*, Cincinnati Friends Meeting, Cincinnati, OH.

Hughes, R.T. & Roberts, R.L., 2001, *The churches of Christ*, Greenwood, Press, Westport, CT.

Jere, Q., 2018, 'The public role of the church in anti-corruption: An assessment of the CCAP Livingstonia Synod in Malawi from a kenosis perspective', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39(1), a1776. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1776

Jirrie, E., 1972, *How to uproot church problems*, Weaver Press, Harare.

Konyana, E.G., 2013, 'Hunhu/ Ubuntu philosophy incompatible with business ethics? Reflections on business viability in rural Shona communities in Zimbabwe', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 10(2), 67–71. https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-01026771

Magaisa, A., 2021, 'Looting the "Honest Shop"; Dissecting the Auditor General's Report', *Big Saturday Read Blog*, viewed 26 June 2021, from https://bigsr.africa/bsr-looting-the-honest-shop.

Makina, D., 2014, 'Historical perspective in Zimbabwe economic performance: A tale of five lost decades', *Journal of Developing Societies* 26, 99–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X1002600105

Manyoganise, M., 2020, 'Together for development? The Zimbabwe Council of Churches, The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop Conference and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe', in E. Chitando (ed.), *The Zimbabwe Council of Churches and development in Zimbabwe*, pp. 37–50, Palgrave Mcmillan, Cham.

Masengwe, G., 2021, 'Africanising the four-self-leadership formula in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 47(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/8159

Mataire, R., 2021, 'Through their words we remain inspired', *The Herald Zimbabwe*, 19 April 2021.

Maverick Citizen, 2021, Cartel power Dynamics in Zimbabwe: A Report. fepafrika.ch/wp-content/uploads/Cartel-Power-Dynamics-in-Zimbabwe.pdf

Mbiti, J.S., 1990, *African religions and philosophy*, Heinemann Educational Publishers, Oxford.

McKim, D.K., 1996, *Westminster dictionary of theological terms*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.

Mdingi, H., 2020, 'Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God: Kenosis of leadership', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(2), a5844. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i2.5844

Mpofu, S., 2015, 'The theological dilemma vis-à-vis the moral options for relevant and practical ministry today: Lessons for the zimbabwe council of churches', *UNISA, Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 41(1), 67–85.

Muchechetere, A.A., 2009, 'A historical analysis of the role of the church in advocating for good governance in zimbabwe: Heads of christian denominations (HOCD) advocacy in Zimbabwe's political, social and economic impasse from 2003 to 2008', Dissertation submitted to Africa Leadership and Management Academy (ALMA), Harare.

Muzurura, J., 2019, 'Foreign direct investment in Zimbabwe: The role of uncertainty, exportscost of capital, corruption, anmd market size', *The Economics and Finance letters. Conscientia Beam* 6(1), 9–24.

National Development Strategy 1, 2020, 'Towards a Prosperous & Empowered Upper Middle Income Society by 2030'- January 2021-December 2025, Harare.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. & Ruhanya, P. (eds.), 2020, *The history and political transition of Zimbabwe: From mugabe to mnangagwa* (African Histories and Modernities), Palgrave MacMillan, Cham.

Noll, M.A., 2002, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Okafor, C., Smith, L.M. & Ujah, N., 2014, 'Kleptocracy, nepotism, kakistocracy: Impact of corruption in Sub-Saharan African countries', *International Journal of Economics and Accounting* 5(2), 97–115.

Sande, N., 2017, 'Contextualising the theology of competition: Towards the nexus of pentecostal faith, politics and development in Zimbabwe', *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 7(3), Quarter 3.

Transparency International (TI CPI), 2020, Corruption Perception Index 2020, online, https://www.transparency.org/cpi

Zakeyo, M., n.d., *The church, politics and the future of Zimbabwe*, Zimbabwe Advocacy Office, Geneva.