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The Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Problem of Corruption in Malawi

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Corruption in Malawi, in various forms, has become a curse, plague, 'cancer' and the 'AIDS of democracy'.¹ It is a scourge that 'pervert[s] integrity'.² To many, this situation stands in stark contrast to the one-party state era before Malawi became a multi-party democracy in 1994. For example, Malawian commentator Rudo Tariro has stated that the one-party state did not tolerate nonsense but encouraged hard work and re-

sponsibility. Today, corruption is high because there are no strict tools to regulate people's morality. Malawians seem to have lost a sense of personal responsibility.³

The prevailing form of corruption in contemporary Malawi is financial in nature. Many scholars have argued that the one-party system in Malawi was corrupt as well, because those in power committed atrocities. I do not mean to exonerate Malawi's one-party regime while vilifying the era of multi-party, democratic governance. Nor do I deny that corruption can become 'an integrated part of the totalitarian domination'.⁴ However, there is no evidence that the prior regime was also corrupt financially. The cur-

1 Kempe Ronald Hope, 'Corruption and Development in Africa', in Kempe Ronald Hope and B. C. Chikulo (eds.), *Corruption and Development in Africa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 17.

2 Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2008), 165. I define 'corruption' broadly as 'abuse of vocation'. This is a wider usage than the common definition as 'abuse of public office or power for private gain' generally applied by such organizations as Transparency International, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Their definition seems to target only those who have been officially appointed to public office, whereas corruption also occurs amongst people who do not hold government employment.

3 Rudo Tariro, 'Dzuka Malawi: We Need Kamuzuism, a Bit of Magufulification and Binguism to Save the Nation', *Nyasa Times*, 8 February 2016, <https://www.nyasatimes.com/dzuka-malawi-we-need-kamuzuism-a-bit-of-magufuli-and-binguism-to-save-nation/>.

4 Jacob Dahl Rendtorff, 'The Concept of Corruption: Moral and Political Perspectives', *Organization and Management* 139, no. 1 (2010): 125.

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rent anti-corruption initiatives fail because they are mostly reactive and prosecutorial.

This article suggests proactive approaches to corruption, and it calls on the church to develop a robust conception of responsibility for its members. Although addressing corruption should be a matter of concern for Christians anywhere, it should especially be an ecclesiastical priority in Malawi, given the influence of the church in Malawian society. Bonhoeffer's ethics of *Stellvertretung* (or vicarious, responsible action) can equip Christians in Malawi and elsewhere to address public corruption.

I. A Contrast between Two Political Eras

Our world is a complex one with various challenges, which are often described by means of the anagram VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous).⁵ In this VUCA world, corruption is a prominent vice, complex in nature and difficult to deal with.⁶ Modern Malawi's chronic corruption fits the VUCA description.⁷

5 See Jacobus (Kobus) Kok and Barney Jordaan, 'The Metanarraphors We Lead and Mediate By: Insight from Cognitive Metaphor Theory in the Context of Mediation in a VUCA World', in Jacobus (Kobus) Kok and Steven C. van den Heuvel, *Leading in a VUCA World: Integrating Leadership, Discernment and Spirituality* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 1.

6 Reyes C. Cuadrado and Jose L. A. Arce, 'The Complexity of Corruption: Nature and Ethical Suggestions', Working Paper 05/06, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales, Universidad de Navarra, 2014, 2.

7 Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), *Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Southern Africa: A Review* (Johan-

At the end of the British colonialist era in the late 1950s, Malawi became a multi-party, democratic state. However, in 1964 the country reverted to one-party status and was ruled for the next thirty years by President Hastings Kamuzu Banda, an American- and Scottish-trained surgeon. Banda emphasized 'four cornerstones' as values for Malawi: unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline.⁸

After Banda's rule ended, many relics of Kamuzuism (the popular term for Banda's ideology), including the 'four cornerstones', were removed from the public sphere.⁹ Some groups have been less than enthusiastic about the transition. The Episcopal Conference of Malawi, composed of Roman Catholic bishops, has described Malawi's democratization project (from

nesburg: OSISA, 2017), 132. See also Thomas Schirrmacher and David Schirrmacher, *Corruption: When Self-Interest Comes Before the Common Good*, ed. and rev. Thomas K. Johnson, trans. Richard McClary (Bonn: Culture and Science Publishing, 2019), 22, 23; Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 164–73.

8 Gwanda Chakuamba, 'A Memoir of My Political Life: Malignant Loyalty—But No Regrets!' ed. Felix Lombe (Lilongwe: Babeya Publishers, 2016), 14–15.

9 'Kamuzuism' described Banda as president for life, father and founder of the Malawi nation, and the fount of unparalleled knowledge and wisdom for all people in Malawi. See Reuben Chirambo, 'Operation Bwezani': The Army, Political Change, and Dr. Banda's Hegemony in Malawi', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 13, no. 2 (2004): 148. Whether these claims are interpreted seriously or not, the ideology of Kamuzuism does not fit into Christian ethics, which holds that mortals do not have unparalleled knowledge. Being 'all-knowing' is an attribute of God alone, but he desires that mortals should have the wisdom to know him.

the early 1990s to the present) as ‘a change without transformation and a democracy without democrats’.¹⁰ This view characterizes the apparent shallowness of the democratic reforms, as evidenced by the failure of Malawi’s leaders to be accountable and transparent.

Harri Englund, a research fellow at the Institute for Asian and African Studies in Helsinki, Finland, argues that in dispensing with the public values articulated by the Banda regime, Malawi made room for a lawless society. In direct opposition to the ‘four cornerstones’, cases of disunity, disloyalty, disobedience and indiscipline (reflected in corrupt practices) became the order of the day.¹¹ The dominant narrative of the multi-party, democratic era emphasizes the political atrocities that the one-party state committed, but even critics acknowledge that new problems have arisen since 1994. For example, Qeko Jere (a Malawian pastor, systematic theologian, lecturer and currently post-doctoral researcher at North-West University, South Africa) states that ‘corruption was amplified ... and continued to spread during the multi-

party, democratic era’.¹² When he discusses the extent of corruption following 1994, he cites numerous scandals as evidence that corruption has indeed accelerated. Englund agrees with Jere on this point.¹³ Furthermore, Patrick Mogha (an Anti-Corruption Bureau official) argues that the implementation of decentralization in Malawi during the multi-party, democratic era ‘has opened new windows for corruption opportunities’.¹⁴

When the one-party state began to govern in 1964, its ‘four cornerstones’ were put in place primarily to govern Banda’s Malawi Congress Party (MCP). Since there was no separation between party and government business—or between church and state—eventually these cornerstones became the foundation for government and the church as well.¹⁵ Until

10 Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), ‘Pastoral Letter’ (Lilongwe, 2013), www.ecmmw.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/PASTORAL-LETTER-English-No22.pdf, 7.

11 Englund has stated that the ethical, diligent, obedient and loyal public officer, characterized by a high work ethic, under the one-party state has been replaced by the cunning public officer of the multi-party state, who is more ‘business-minded’ than anything else. See Harri Englund (ed.), *A Democracy of Chameleons: Politics and Culture in the New Malawi* (Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001), 19, 46.

12 Qeko Jere, ‘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, no. 1 (2018): 2.

13 Englund, *Democracy*, 47 states that the ‘incidence of crime increased sharply’ in the multi-party era.

14 Patrick Mogha, ‘Assessment of the Nexus between Decentralization and Corruption: The Case of Malawi’ (Master’s thesis, International Anti-Corruption Academy, Laxenburg, Austria, 2009), iv.

15 Malawi Congress Party (MCP), ‘The Constitution of the Malawi Congress Party: Rules and Regulations’ (Blantyre: Blantyre Print and Packaging, 1971), 27. The church, especially the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), which is the country’s largest Presbyterian denomination, aligned itself with the one-party state, putting itself in a difficult position to speak against it. Banda was a CCAP elder. See Kenneth R. Ross, ‘The Transition of Power in Malawi 1992–1994: The Role of the Christian Churches’, in *God,*

1994, the cornerstones effectively influenced all sectors of society, since by default, every adult Malawian was a member of the party.¹⁶ Public officers were expected to operate within the framework of the 'four cornerstones' and crime, especially in forms related to corruption, was unknown.¹⁷ Government 'exercised strict control over the civil service'.¹⁸ For this reason, government service delivery was efficient and effective, since civil servants exhibited a work ethic characterized by discipline and allegiance to their vocation.¹⁹

II. The Failure of Anti-Corruption Initiatives

Gerhard Anders mentions that in his research on Malawi, nearly no one he interviewed indicated any awareness of corruption before 1994.²⁰ In con-

trast, many sectors today, especially the civil service, are riddled with 'high levels of corruption',²¹ despite the country's ratification of a number of international anti-corruption protocols²² and the enactment of national anti-corruption frameworks such as the Corrupt Practices Act (CPA, 1995), Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), and National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS). In 2018, the country ranked thirty-second globally on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, indicating a high degree of corruption.²³ Why should corruption have proliferated in Malawi's multi-party, democratic era amidst a number of anti-corruption laws and initiatives? Several responses can be given.

First, in 1994, as the country was returning to multi-party governance, the process lacked clear ethical structures upon which to build a democratic state. The new leaders' main agenda was to abolish anything that reflected the one-party state's philosophy of governance. Accordingly, as soon as the past—including Banda's 'four cornerstones'—was removed from the public domain, evidence of bad governance and irresponsibility emerged.²⁴

People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective (Mzuzu: Luviri Prints, 2018), 19–20.

16 MCP, 'Constitution', 7. A mandatory party card system was used for identification and considered fundamental to national development and security.

17 Englund, *Democracy*, 12, 47.

18 Englund, *Democracy*, 45.

19 Donal Brody, *Conversations with Kamuzu: The Life and Times of Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda*, part 1-11 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Libraries, 2000), <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/4384086>, 31; Englund, *Democracy*, 47.

20 Gerhard Anders, 'Like Chameleons: Civil Servants and Corruption in Malawi', *Bulletin de l'APAD* 23, no. 24 (2002): 5. On this point, I am aware of the psychological mechanism of 'nostalgia': people tend to remember and adore the past especially if the present fails to fulfil their high expectations. During the one-party state, the only known anti-corruption tool was the Forfeiture Act (1966). It

was seriously enforced to deter people from wanton accumulation of wealth.

21 Englund, *Democracy*, 47.

22 These protocols include the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the African Union Convention on Preventing Corruption and the Southern African Development Community Protocol against Corruption.

23 Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2018* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2019), www.transparency.org/cpi, 6.

24 Englund, *Democracy*, 19, 26, 46, 47; John

In this ethical vacuum, weaknesses in the government's service delivery system became evident. The Episcopal Conference of Malawi refers to 'continued and systematic abuse and looting of public resources for selfish party and personal benefit to the detriment of national good'.²⁵ The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) describes the emergence of 'new corrupt elites that undermined democratic accountability and the fight against corruption'.²⁶

Second, Martin Ott, Kings Phiri and Nandini Patel suggest that the anti-corruption initiatives are failing because of the ACB's lack of empowerment to deal with corruption as a way of life.²⁷ Their observation is significant here, in the sense that when corruption becomes intricately embedded in the cultural systems of the people, it may not be easily overcome by textbook-based legal systems. Furthermore, the law that the ACB is empowered to apply has failed to function effectively, due to the government's vetoes of some prosecuto-

rial decisions in government-related corruption cases.²⁸

Third, the considerable rhetoric expressed from political podiums regarding corruption may actually be counter-productive.²⁹ Most of the anti-corruption initiatives have been heavily publicized by politicians. Since they are state-driven and state-controlled, they are widely seen as only tools for the political witch-hunting of opponents. The anti-corruption initiatives have focused much on meting out sanctions and not on the source of corruption. Similarly, the ACB tends to treat the wound rather than the cause of the wound; meanwhile, Malawian government officials frequently act with impunity due to a lack of commitment at the highest political level to punish ethical violations.³⁰ This trend renders anti-corruption initiatives incidental and causes them to stagnate.³¹

Fourth, the ACB has failed to educate Malawi's people on all matters of corruption, so people are generally unaware of the anti-corruption laws and of public responsibilities under these laws. On paper, the laws are clear, but we are dealing with a society where the literacy rate is still high

Lwanda, *Politics, Culture and Medicine in Malawi: Historical Continuities and Ruptures with Special Reference to HIV/AIDS* (Zomba: Kachere, 2005), 138–40; Z. Allan Ntata, *Licence to Loot: A Report on the Cashgate Corruption Scandal in Malawi* (London: Middle Temple, 2013), 1–67.

25 ECM, 'Pastoral Letter', 8.

26 Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, *Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Southern Africa: A Review* (Johannesburg: OSISA, 2017), 3.

27 Martin Ott, Kings M. Phiri and Nandini Patel (eds.), *Malawi's Second Democratic Elections: Process, Problems and Prospects* (Zomba: Kachere, 2000), 17.

28 OSISA, *Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption*, 3; Englund, *Democracy*, 46–47; Roberto Martinez B. Kukutschka, *Overview of Corruption in Malawi: Country Report—Malawi 2014* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2014), 3.

29 Lewis B. Dzimbiri, 'Cultural Change, the Hybrid Administrative System and Public Sector Reforms in Africa: The Case of Anti-corruption Measures in Malawi', *African Anthropologist* 16, nos. 1 & 2 (2009): 56.

30 Dzimbiri, 'Cultural Change', 60.

31 Englund, *Democracy*, 46; Jere, 'Public Role of the Church', 2.

and media coverage of government activities is relatively limited. This defeats NACS theory that public involvement is the bedrock for supporting anti-corruption drives.³²

Effective public involvement requires citizens' willingness to report (through whistle-blowing) cases of corruption that they experience or witness. However, for this process to work, two conditions are necessary: an environment in which people feel it is safe for them to report corruption, and general knowledge of anti-corruption laws. At the moment, neither of these two conditions is fulfilled in Malawi. Many people are afraid to 'blow the whistle' due to concerns for retaliation or other severe repercussions.

Fifth, there is no systematic, detailed theological discourse on corruption. Kenneth Ross observes that the church actually distanced itself from the political process after the 1993 referendum in which Malawians approved the re-introduction of multi-party democracy.³³ As a member of the Presbyterian Church, I have never heard a sermon on corruption. Yet the church has one of the most precious resources available to address corruption: a large and faithful following.³⁴ Historically, the church has

been better placed than any other institution to develop and promote proactive approaches that inculcate fundamental moral responsibility.³⁵ The church can use its resources to equip people to function as salt and light in our VUCA world. The ethic of responsibility advanced by Christianity should promote virtuous character and moral goodness among the people.

III. Applying Bonhoeffer's *Stellvertretung* to Corruption

The aim of any anti-corruption initiative should be to transform people's minds and hearts. From an ethical perspective, committing a crime is inherently dependent on the condition of the mind and heart, and it is from the mind that the heart's desires flow.³⁶ Jacob Dahl Rendtorff writes, 'Any society that has a background mentality and morality of individuals based on a healthy skepticism towards bribery and a sense of justice ... as well as proud refusal of being bought for social services, will have the foundations for avoidance of

32 Joseph J. Chunga and Jacob Mazalale, "Is Malawi Losing the Battle against 'Cashgate'?" *Afro Barometer Dispatch* 149 (2017): 5.

33 Ross, "Transition of Power", 39. On 14 June 1993, Malawian approved multi-party democracy in a referendum. The first democratically elected president took office in 1994.

34 Malawi is approximately 68 percent Christian, 25 percent Muslim, and 7 percent other faiths. See 'Malawi Population 2019', <http://worldpopulationreview.com/coun->

[tries/malawi-population/](http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/malawi-population/).

35 Rendtorff, 'The Concept of Corruption', 128.

36 Here I borrow Patrick Nullens' terminology, according to which 'heart' refers to 'the center of the person, the mind, will, emotion, conscience; the seat of all our emotional and intellectual life'. See Patrick Nullens, 'The Sentiments of the Heart and Protestant Ethics: A Constructive Dialogue between Paul Ramsey and Max Scheler', in Steven C. van den Heuvel, Patrick Nullens and Angela Roothaan, *Theological Ethics and Moral Value Phenomena: The Experience of Values* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), 33.

corruption'.³⁷

Based on this understanding, we should pursue proactive strategies that aim at changing the condition of the mind and heart before corruption happens. For example, Jere has suggested a *kenotic* approach.³⁸ Christoph Stuckelberger also proposes a proactive approach to ensure that 'spiritual, ethical and institutional bases are strengthened'.³⁹ Spiritual and ethical values are fundamental in decision making. A person who has solid values and puts them into practice will behave properly and be able to deal with temptations to act corruptly.⁴⁰

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ethics of *Stellvertretung* (translated as vicarious, responsible action), which can also be understood as standing in for another person in a place where this person cannot stand⁴¹ and thus calls Christians to a life of 'self-less living', can effectively supplement existing approaches. Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), a German theologian and Lutheran pastor, concretely lived out unselfishness towards others. The life experiences of his time shaped his theology and ethics, which have been

widely read and studied on both academic and non-academic levels since his death in a concentration camp shortly before the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.⁴²

Bonhoeffer's great theological and ethical significance makes it appropriate to engage with his work in a conversation on corruption. Bonhoeffer did not deal with financial corruption, but he addressed the blatant corruption of power present in the Nazi regime. He understood that power is God-given and that, as such, leaders must use it to serve the people. He implored Christians to live for the cause of Christ in all their actions. Living in Christ and for Christ alone is abstract if it is not translated into living for others. This is the essence of an ethic of *Stellvertretung*.

The distressing events of the 1930s and 1940s in Germany challenged Bonhoeffer's Christian thought, life and conviction. What is the Christian's role amidst violence against 'the Other'? What does Christianity really mean for us and who is Christ for us today? Bonhoeffer asked these questions in light of the extreme suffering he was witnessing. The answer he found was that true Christianity is about being 'burdened with guilt' (suffering) for the sake of 'the Other' who is suffering.⁴³ For Bonhoeffer, a

37 Rendtorff, 'Concept of Corruption', 129.

38 Jere, 'Public Role of the Church', 1–10.

39 Christoph Stuckelberger, *Free-Corruption Churches are Possible: Experiences, Values and Solutions* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2010), 17.

40 Gintare Satiene and Rita Toleikiene, 'A Connection between Corruption and Unethical Behaviour of Public Officials', *Social Research* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155–56.

41 Christopher Holmes, 'The Indivisible Whole of God's Reality': On the Agency of Jesus in Bonhoeffer's Ethics', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 3 (2010): 293.

42 For an excellent biography of Bonhoeffer, see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., edited by Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000). Bethge was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's closest friend and correspondent.

43 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, vol. 6 of Bonhoeffer's *Works*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 233.

person is required to act on behalf of others.⁴⁴ Someone who follows Christ has to be able to bear the claim of the other person upon himself. 'He/she has to take the other person as an obligation, even to allow the other person to place on me the burden of their freedom.'⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer came to see true Christianity as a concrete faith based on *praxis* ('doing') and 'self-less living'.

In *Stellvertretung*, *praxis* is understood as a concrete life of action, centred on Christ and expressing solidarity with those who are suffering. In this understanding, one can bear the suffering of others only through the motivation of Christ. The experience of guilt comes when a person has an interest in the challenges faced by 'the Other'. This guilt indicates that one is living a life of responsibility toward 'the Other', motivated by Jesus who vicariously took the guilt of all human beings upon himself.

Further, in *Stellvertretung*, all life is a call to live for others, to do for others and to suffer for others.⁴⁶ *Stellvertretung* is manifested in the principle of having a zeal or motivation to help those who are in need. It is also a call for respecting what belongs to another, and thus for the exercise of justice. For Bonhoeffer, only self-less people truly live.⁴⁷ In other words, true living is possible 'only in completely devoting one's own life to another person'.⁴⁸ It is the highest of values to serve hu-

man beings.⁴⁹ As such, there is no self-aggrandizement in *Stellvertretung*.

Bonhoeffer further explores the question of the relationship between free responsibility and obedience in *Stellvertretung*. For him, 'One act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons.'⁵⁰ How then do responsibility and obedience play a role in *Stellvertretung*? His answer is that there cannot be 'self-less living' without obedience, for obedience is self-surrender. Therefore, responsibility and obedience are interwoven, so that 'responsibility does not merely begin where obedience ends, but obedience is rendered in responsibility'.⁵¹

Bonhoeffer's Christocentric ethics of *Stellvertretung* is timeless, rich and specific, making him 'a unique source for understanding of interaction between religion, politics and culture'.⁵² Even though his ethics arose out of an extremely turbulent historical situation, geographically and contextually far from modern Africa, it still has relevance for Malawi today. How, then, is *Stellvertretung* applicable in light of corruption? *Stellvertretung* can be displayed in themes such as self-less living for 'the Other', bondage to God, freedom of the individual life and the role of a disciple and citizen in a VUCA world.⁵³ Each of these concepts is dis-

44 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 257–58.

45 David F. Ford and Rachael Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 49.

46 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 259.

47 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 236.

48 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 259.

49 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 260.

50 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 286.

51 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 288.

52 Clifford J. Green, editor's note in Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, vii.

53 In Bonhoeffer's ethics, the penultimate (worldly things such as the state) serves the ultimate and realizes the ultimate (Christ, the ultimate reality); see Stefan Heuser, 'The Cost of Citizenship: Disciple and Citizen in Bonhoeffer's Political Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 3 (2005): 49–69.

cussed below.

Self-less living for 'the Other': Bonhoeffer's argumentation makes it clear that any person who is vicariously responsible lives a self-less life for the sake of 'the Other'. An essential part of being human is to live a self-less life in relation to others.⁵⁴ Such a person sacrificially engages in programmes that serve the needs of 'the Other' and certainly cannot plan evil against 'the Other'. In addition, *Stellvertretung* is a reminder to those in positions of power that they are there for the sake of 'the Other'. If properly motivated by this consideration, they will not indulge in corrupt practices that make 'the Other' suffer. Corruption is a sign of self-aggrandizement, which is the opposite of self-less living.

Bondage to God and to humanity. If all humanity would remember that they are bonded to 'the Other' in God's love, they would think twice before indulging in corrupt practices. They would refrain from stealing another person's property because of this bondedness. They would strive for openness (transparency) because the picture of 'the Other' would be so vivid in their face. Without this understanding, the picture and face of 'the Other' is blurred. *Stellvertretung* emphasizes the bondedness of Christ to human beings and to God; as part of our response to Christ, we should be bonded to one another, to Christ and to God. In this bondedness, self-denial, forgiveness, suffering,

renunciation and love of enemies—all key qualities of a good life—are fundamental.⁵⁵ Embracing these values would equip people to resist the temptation to indulge in any corrupt practice.

Freedom of the individual life. For Bonhoeffer, the freedom of the individual implies individual accountability.⁵⁶ Instead of exalting themselves, individuals are conscious of their relationship with 'the Other'. At the end of the day, one has to give account to somebody. In *Stellvertretung*, the autonomous self does not exist; rather, the self exists only in relation to 'the Other'. 'For a Christian', says William Schweiker, 'the empowerment of persons to be responsible agents in history is to serve the purpose of respecting and enhancing the integrity of life before God.'⁵⁷ Where the self has no room to act on its own but always acts in relationship to others, there can be little room for corruption.

Disciple and citizen. A disciple is someone whose heart is ruled by Christ; a citizen is called to co-operate and help others in his or her life situations, or in the institutions where he or she works.⁵⁸ Fighting corruption must take place in the context of the realization that all Christians have responsibilities as both disciples and citizens. A disciple is called (i.e. given a vocation) and answers (responds) to Christ's call by acting in a 'self-less' manner in service to others. In his book *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer

54 Steven C. van den Heuvel, 'Leadership and the Ethics of Responsibility: An Engagement with Dietrich Bonhoeffer', in Patrick Nullens and Steven van den Heuvel, *The Challenges of Moral Leadership* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 120.

55 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 241.

56 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 257–58.

57 William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31.

58 Heuser, 'Cost of Citizenship', 68.

ffer urges Christians, as disciples of Christ, to 'bear the burdens and sufferings of the neighbour'.⁵⁹

But what about our role as citizens? The challenge is that sometimes people view their Christian beliefs as something private and out of place in matters of political action. For Bonhoeffer, a citizen, by virtue of his or her submission to God's natural law, is also called (given a vocation, *Beruf*, in his or her respective placement) to be of service to fellow citizens.⁶⁰ Because these callings apply to everyone, I prefer to depart from the conventional definition of corruption as 'abuse of public office, power or authority' and instead to refer to it as 'abuse of *vocation*'.

Both as disciples and as citizens, we can fall prey to a deficient understanding of vocation which falls short of accountability, integrity and transparency.⁶¹ For example, a police officer has a vocation to serve honourably as a police officer, much like any public official or even a vendor selling merchandise on a street corner. If the police officer abuses his or her vocation by taking advantage of his or her position for personal benefit, that is abuse towards oneself and also towards the calling of being a police officer. Moreover, in a country like Malawi that is 68 percent Christian, corruption would not be a major issue if Christian citizens would see the need for Christian 'values to

be transformed in terms of practical moral integrity'.⁶² William Schweiker argues for the development of a theory of values applicable to Christians which 'entails a transvaluation of values'.⁶³ For all this to happen, the church should have the kind of influence in society which would flow over to non-Christians as well. That would enable members of society to call on the church for support when they encounter temptations to indulge in corruption.

Practically, the church could undertake approaches to corruption besides the existing state-driven initiatives. For example, it could make the subject of corruption a priority in its programmes, church administrative meetings and Bible studies. Furthermore, lessons for children's Sunday-school classes and lay leaders could incorporate topics on corruption. Martin Ott also suggests a systematized and 'step by step' establishment of a robust ethics of the 'common good' in the church to address private and public morality. At the moment, this ethic is 'diffused and scattered'.⁶⁴

The one-party era in Malawi, though its serious deficiencies must not be ignored, created an environment of accountability or even fear that pushed civil servants to perform with high quality. Through its 'four cornerstones', it enforced the concern for others that Bonhoeffer argued we all should embrace voluntarily. The

59 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, vol. 1 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 1, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 179.

60 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 257.

61 Schirmmacher and Schirmmacher, *Corruption*, 23.

62 Schweiker, *Responsibility*, 30.

63 Schweiker, *Responsibility*, 30. The term 'transvaluation of values' here should not be understood in terms of Nietzsche's conceptualization, which was based on his contempt for Christianity and its moral system.

64 Ott, 'Role of the Christian Churches', 142, 143, 144.

arrival of democracy has caused corruption to flourish more freely rather than restraining it.⁶⁵ Embracing the 'four cornerstones' and Bonhoeffer's ethic of *Stellvertretung* would help to combat corruption and restore sanity in the financial sector. The positive value of removing an authoritarian dictator from power may be great, but so is the value of preventing corruption.

IV. Conclusion

Corruption has become an endemic part of the social fabric in multi-party, democratic Malawi. This situation is at least partly explained by the unique nature of Malawi's transition from a one-party state to a multi-party sys-

tem. Even though a number of anti-corruption initiatives are present, these are state-driven and not sufficiently preventive or proactive; rather, they are reactive, focusing mainly on prosecutions (and sometimes even undermining those prosecutions).

Fighting corruption in Malawi requires a transvaluation of values by the church. We need conscious, ongoing development of a robust conception of the ethic of *Stellvertretung* in the church and in public life. This radically self-less ethic would supplement existing legislation on corruption, which by itself is insufficient and failing. Internalizing the centrality to all life of vicarious, responsible action, which calls for self-less living, would control the desires of the mind and heart, which are the main catalysts of corrupt practices.

65 Mogha, 'Assessment of the Nexus'.