

The interface between liturgy and moral decision-making in defiance of cognitive distortions that underlie corruption

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Abstract

The central theme of the present argument is the matter of church participants' engagement in liturgy and how this could enhance their capacity for making moral decisions. First, one should acknowledge that participants in the liturgy and faith communities have to cope with the reality that people should make moral decisions within the public domain. Liturgy has inevitably enabled participants to see things they do not or may not want to. The functioning of cognitive distortions in corruption is evident in systemic political corruption and micro-levels of community and culture. Furthermore, people are confronted with different kinds of understandings about corruption. In this article, it is argued that moral decision-making should be enhanced and communicated by liturgy. It embarks on descriptive, systemising, and strategizing perspectives to delineate faith communities' responsibility regarding people's duty to act morally within their environments. First, this article offers a descriptive section of the currently concerning aspects to be found under this rubric. Second, systemising perspectives based on the philosophy of religion and cognitive psychology are examined as centred on the intimate interplay with ethics and liturgy. Finally, the following research question is formulated and briefly discussed: Could participation in the liturgy offer a new understanding to people confronted with moral decision-making in a praxis of cognitive corruption? The methodological approach of Browning has been carefully identified to arrange the research into coherent phases and reflect on the research question. The article concludes with one or two practical theological perspectives that could lead to a follow-up discussion around how cognitive corruption could be addressed within a liturgical praxis.

Keywords

Liturgy; moral decision-making; cognitive distortions; cognitive corruption

1. Introduction

In 2020 and 2021 faith communities were obliged to adapt to new practices in which ethics of care became important (Branicki 2020:875). The World Health Organization has correspondingly engaged with many leaders of countries across the globe to prevent infections and protect people's lives. A multi-million-rand emergency fund was made available by the government to relieve vulnerable people's needs. However, while most people experienced a need for care, corrupt people¹ were not unsettled and went ahead to get hold of funds and essential resources. Their so-called "care" yielded nothing but the lining of their own pockets. The unsettling news emerged in August 2020 that Covid-19 PPE (personal protective equipment) corruption had manifested in South Africa.² In response, the President of the World Health Organization released a statement and indicated that corruption is immoral and is nothing else than a betrayal of public trust. This is even more severe in times of a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic (Corruption Watch 2021:4).

Eleven corruption complaints³ related to the multi-million-rand emergency fund within only the hard lockdown period between March to May 2020 were reported to Corruption Watch (Corruption Watch 2021:6). The inevitable question arises as to how it is possible that a society can become so morally mindless that it will even steal food from hungry citizens. It centres on concern about a corrupt mentality that contradicts the notion of responsible citizenship (Pomytkina *et al.* 2020:3). This mentality involves deep-rooted cognitive derailments and includes people becoming corrupt before committing a corrupt act. The gravity of this matter is reflected in

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- 1 Corruption could be defined as the abuse of material (resources) and competency for one's own advantage (See Dupuy and Neset 2018:3). The idea of benefitting from your practices becomes evident. People are susceptible to a variety of cognitive biases that shape their decision-making and behaviour.
 - 2 Reports on PPE corruption is related to concerns about the following aspects, namely R500 billion relief packages, social grants for vulnerable people, temporary employees' schemes as well as employee relief schemes (Corruption Watch, 4 September 2020:1). Benefits were claimed on behalf of unknowing or deceased people. People even mention the idea of rampant looting of PPE.
 - 3 As of 31 August 2020, 67 770 social grant recipients who were not eligible for grants as they were employed in government or had income from other sources, including other social grants, UIF payments, or bursaries from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme have been identified (Auditor-General, Citizen Report, 2020:10).

the annual report of Corruption Watch released on the 25th of March 2021, where an analogy is made between the pandemic and a time of war. During a war, soldiers' theft of food and safety equipment was regarded as treason to be punished accordingly (Lewis 2017:3). Whether the pandemic presents anything less severe than these circumstances surfaces, and the immediate need for a deeper understanding of corruption springs to mind in response to this.⁴

Alexander (2010:27) reminds us that people utilise many underlying excuses that function as the building blocks for cognitive corruption.⁵ Callagher and Zahavi (2007:22) add to this and notice the accumulated impact of cognitive distortions in people's thinking processes. First, they depend on an employer or group and ignore corrupt practices because of pressure exerted on them. Second, the fear of losing their jobs shows that silence is golden instead of acting as whistle-blowers. As viewed from a deeper angle, this kind of silence could be caused by an inability to report corrupt practices because of continuous threats or even faked reports that will cause trouble for a whistle-blower's future within the workplace. Third, people try to rationalise their acts (Fiske 2004:133). This includes the idea that they eventually justify corruption by thinking that only a court can find them guilty of a misdeed. People's rationality could make it difficult to prove allegations of corruption. If people are involved in corruption, they will inevitably discover a rational motivation for their practices. Thus, the actions of ignoring, fearing, and rationalising, as highlighted above, create a problematic praxis for people at the grassroots level. Hence, they might compare themselves with others and think that minor corruptions are not

4 The Corruption Perception Index report delineates that the Covid-19 pandemic is in fact a corruption crisis (Corruption Perception Index, 2020:8).

5 Authors like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bentham, and Mill have embarked on the notion of cognitive corruption to indicate a distortion of judgement in people's lives (Menissier 2013:3). Hauser, Simonyan, and Werner (2013:4) embroiders on this idea and indicate that cognitive corruption has to do with neutralization techniques used as cognitive strategies to ease feelings of remorse and disregard the guilt and social stigma associated with engaging in unethical or illegal practices. Moreover, individuals use neutralization techniques to highlight the "positive" intentions underlying their unethical or illegal actions. Cognitive mechanisms utilised by people could entail the following: "moral justification, euphemistic labelling, advantageous comparison, diffusion, displacement of responsibility, distorting consequences, dehumanization, and attributing blame to others" (Manara et al. 2020:2).

harmful. The distorted cognition that holds that one's acts are not nearly as corrupt as others' is a matter of concern (Gault 2017:828).

Furthermore, people could debate that it is simply impossible to stop corruption in society in the grips of a distorted thinking process. Finally, people could visualise a difference between what is happening at the workplace and the euphoria of participating in the liturgy within worshipping communities. The unavoidable consequence will then be that the message conveyed by the liturgy is ignored and has no effect on what should be altered in daily life. Therefore, it makes sense that Porter and Chandler (2021:10) indicate the need for the liturgy to teach people about things they cannot see or state aspects they do not want to see. We should be conscious that faith communities' participants are involved in all spheres of society and are exposed to constantly making decisions (Senn 2019:2). Tenbrunsel's (2009:204) concern goes further due to the biased perceptions of ethicality suffered by people. The tension inherent in cognitive corruption⁶ is that people rationalise even retroactively and think they behaved more ethically than they did (Tenbrunsel 2009:5).

Furthermore, what one person sees as a corrupt act is not necessarily true for another person's mind (Canache *et al.* 2019: 134). The possibility exists that even our understanding or definitions of corruption could become distorted. There is little doubt that cognitive distortions should, after all, be seen as the deeper root giving rise to the resilient functioning of corruption (cf. De Cruchy 2011:3 and Calderisi 2006:90). Therefore, the interplay between liturgics and ethics (including moral decision-making) remains relevant for people living in South Africa. Louis-Marie Chauvet has gone as far as to indicate that we should acknowledge the interconnection between the domains of liturgy and ethics (1995:341). Powers (2020:162) also writes in this vein and refers to the importance of Bonhoeffer's work,

6 People rationalise or justify behaviour to make them acceptable to themselves and others. This is also true of corrupt conduct (Dupuy & Neset 2018:2–3). The rationalisation for immoral behaviour attempts to account for breaking social norms against unethical behaviour and avoid judgment for an ethical breach, a form of self-defence. Ashford and Anand (2003:7) argue that one of the ways in which corruption is normalised in organisations is through rationalisation: "the process by which individuals who engage in corrupt acts use socially constructed accounts to legitimate the actions in their own eyes."

with an emphasis on everyday life,⁷ which brings people back to reality and daily liturgy. We are always bound to life, certainly including the moral decisions to be made there (Powers 2020:161, Bonhoeffer 2009:169 and Van Gelder 2007:41–46).

Therefore, the question arises: *Could participation in the liturgy provide a new understanding for people confronted with moral decision-making in a praxis of cognitive corruption?* In this regard, Browning (1996:13) defines a research activity as a process that starts with a *description* and then moves to *systemise*. Eventually, *strategizing* perspectives will be used here to arrange and reflect on the materials included in this article.

2. Descriptive perspectives on cognitive corruption and moral decision-making

Following the idea of decision making, inherent self-serving perceptions or understandings can result in behaviour that contradicts people’s moral standards (cf. Banaji, Bazerman & Chugh 2003:12). However, the danger where people eagerly crave self-serving actions⁸ in which they get hold of money or valuable things could result in ethical fading, where critical perspectives of what they should do are ignored (Darley 2005:1182 and Rothstein and Tegenhammar 2010:3)

2.1 The government’s struggle to deal with PPE corruption and the importance of the Zondo’s commission report on State Capture

According to the Corruption Watch Report (2021:2), the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that not even procurement policies and laws can prevent corrupt people from malpractices. The fiscal relief package provided by the government was funded by reprioritising the 2020-2021 budgets and securing loans. However, the auditor general’s report provided the shocking news that a deficiency of validation and transparency across

7 In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer essentially asserts that a baseline for becoming a more responsible actor, and thus more like Christ, is the recognition of moral chaos—that the choices faced are not between “right and wrong, good, and evil, but between right and right, wrong and wrong. The challenge is to become fully human and to see the world as it is, accepting its disfigured moral order and attempting to act responsibly in it. (Powers 2020:166).

government platforms resulted in people, including government officials, receiving benefits they were not entitled to (Auditor-General Report, December 2020:1–6).

Meanwhile, 2022 kicked off with the State Capture Report that Judge Raymond Zondo⁹ handed over to President Cyril Ramaphosa on 4 January 2022. The commission's findings reflect the resilience of cognitive corruption: many leaders assigned the entitlement to themselves of engaging in corrupt practices (Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture – Report: Part 1, 2022: iii). However, because of many challenges around witnesses, it took this commission nearly four years to finalise its investigation. Furthermore, its report consists of three parts, and the President announced that government would only provide a comprehensive plan of action once all three parts were received. As a result, it will take months or one more year before remediation. This slow manner of addressing serious allegations evokes questions about the exact reasons for acting against immoral practices. In the first part of the report, allegations of corruption at SAA, SA Express and SAA Technical are scrutinised. The Zondo Commission's report will address the Gupta family's involvement in corrupt practices implicating government officials in a second report. At the same time, the third will deal with the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and serious allegations of irregularities during its actions (Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture – Report: Part 1, 2022: v). Meanwhile, citizens are obliged to continue to pay taxes even as the people administering the process have been implicated.

Consequently, recommendations will also be made on reforming the R500 billion procurement (tender) system, which the commission found to be the critical leverage point of state capture (Judicial Commission of Inquiry

9 According to Zondo's commission report the following important matter should be mentioned: "There can be no gainsaying that corruption threatens to fell at the knees virtually everything we hold dear and precious in our hard-won constitutional order. It blatantly undermines the democratic ethos, the institutions of democracy, the rule of law and the foundational values of our nascent constitutional project. It fuels maladministration and public fraudulence and imperils the capacity of the State to fulfil its obligations to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil all the rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights. When corruption and organised crime flourish, sustainable development and economic growth are stunted. And in turn, the stability and security of society is put at risk" (Zondo Commission Report 2022:840).

into State Capture Report–Part 1, 2022: xii). The conclusion of part 1 of the Zondo Commission Report has revealed that state capture indeed occurred. The request of the government to citizens to be patient with the state while reflecting on the commission’s recommendations seems awkward because the notion of state capture is nothing else than systemic *political corruption*. Therefore, one must assume that a cognitive framework exists for engaging in systemic political corruption and, consequently, citizens will experience an uphill battle to combat it. Strong leadership is needed now as much as ever before to combat the immoral practices of corruption (Rothstein and Tegnhammar 2010:12). Madonsela (2018:2), for one, is frank about this matter and embroiders on the danger of a government allowing these phenomenon to occur.

We should recognise that even participants in the liturgy based on their exposure at all levels in the public domain could begin to justify their corrupt acts. They could also become guilty of having a distorted cognition of corruption, precisely where the vicious cycle of cognitive corruption starts.

3. Systemising perspectives on liturgy and moral decision-making

We must acknowledge the reality of moral conflicts where a person may be confronted by contrary reasoning around rival moral and ethical motivations (Singer *et al.*, 2019:2). Moral conflicts can, amongst others, occur when people decide between personal interest versus an accepted moral value. Furthermore, moral decision-making within conflicting situations offers a challenge to people’s involvement in society and their responsibility as part of a community of believers that wants to act responsibly in the world. For these reasons, decision-making undoubtedly involves a moment of great importance for the person who has to do it (Pomytkina 2020:2). This section will elucidate the triangular interrelationship between ethics, moral reasoning, and moral decision-making.

3.1 Moral decision-making and perspectives from ethics

Kretzschmar & Tuckey (2017:2) emphasise the importance of rethinking the idea of morality. They are adamant that it should not be confused with

a narrow legalistic ethics code. Johnson (1992:209), for example, continues in this vein and underlines the notion of a relational foundation in our understanding of morality. Consequently, a fourfold relationship becomes evident, namely a relationship with God, yourself, others, and creation (Johnson 1989:22). The research of Kohlberg that will be discussed later makes explicit reference to the relational aspect in the process of decision making. In acknowledging the reality that faith communities could make a significant contribution in enabling its participants to engage in ethical conduct, aspects like raising awareness for cognitive corruption, identifying the attitude of self-interest, and emphasising justice in society are communicated, amongst other aspects. The idea mentioned above articulates the importance of *lex orandi-lex credendi-lex vivendi*. It boils down to the fact that participation in the liturgy should influence our thoughts, and our thoughts should influence daily life (Smit 2004: 890). The influence of liturgy dealing with moral development could not be ignored within this interplay.

Smit (2017:63–64) embarks on the essence of an ethical presence in the South African society and prompts us to rethink the possibility of a “grammar for life together” in South Africa by asking an intriguing question: How does civil society (including faith communities) serve the common good? This idea refers to what is shared and profoundly beneficial to all citizens in society. An observing attitude in which one-sided knit-picking occurs without establishing a grammar that could enhance the idea of the common good should be avoided. I fully agree with Koopman (2009:424) that Christians should fully participate in civil society and commit themselves to further improving the quality of life and changing people’s cognition (understanding) interested in building a common good. However, without claiming that the cognitive aspect on its own could provide the only answer, one has to acknowledge that without a sound cognitive foundation provided to people participating in the liturgy, it will become merely impossible to become tangible in combatting corruption. Habermas, for one, has enabled us to recognise the importance of communicative rationality, which is characterised by an openness for further deliberation on essential matters such as corruption (Habermas 1996:360 and De Wet 2017:263).

This boils down to realising the importance of the civil sphere and participation in outlining morals as an integral part of the common good.

De Cruchy (2004:59) provides a poignant insight into what is needed when he highlights that civil society needs committed people who speak the truth about morals and strive to bring new insight into the debate where corruption flourishes due to cognitive distortions. Therefore, the participants in the liturgy should be edified to act as moral agents focussed on life with sound morality and anchored in Kingdom values (Moltmann (1993:8).

3.2 Moral reasoning and moral development viewed from social psychology

Carrigan *et al.* (2018:83) posit the idea of moral development that was initially influenced by the views of Piaget, but with the limitation of focussing on childhood only. Kohlberg (1984:32) has expanded on the theories of Piaget by referring to what people are doing beyond their youth. The idea of moral reasoning with its interrelationship with cognition stands central in his research. Kohlberg (1984:34) has identified six stages of moral judgment closely interwoven with cognitive consideration that function on three levels. These phases are sequential. On the first level, judgement is based on one's own needs (pre-conventional). This dynamic usually is present in the lives of children younger than nine years old. On the second level, societal expectations and the law are considered in one's judgment (conventional phase). In the third phase, the post-conventional, one's own and more abstract decisions are coming into play. It can't be assumed that all adults reach the third level mentioned above, where internalized judgments come into play (Kohlberg 1976:16). In between the various developmental phases, a distortion could be realized in people's cognition. Based on Kohlberg's research, it could not be denied that people's cognitive and emotional development is significant in moral reasoning that should manifest in everyday life. It should be acknowledged that the ability to see life from another perspective and make judgments on a more abstract level is evident within higher levels of moral reasoning. Faith communities should become aware of this reality, especially in their interest in enabling their participants in the liturgy to act responsibly in everyday life (Carrigan *et al.*, 2020:85). In Kohlberg's visualization, one's ability to think about moral issues and the cognitive processes involved in this process could not be ignored (Fiedler & Glöckner 2015:139).

The theory of Kohlberg (1976:17–20) could briefly be described as follows. Each of the three levels listed consists of two stages:

1. Within the pre-conventional level, stage one, people obey rules because of the fear of punishment. The second stage, called individualism and exchange reciprocity, is possible in moral development, but only if it serves one's interests as functioning on this level.
2. The level of conventional morality is characterised by accepting social rules regarding good and morality. Therefore, the idea of conforming to the group's norms becomes vital. At this level of ethics, two stages are evident, namely:
 - The development of good interpersonal relationships. People want to live up to social expectations and expected roles.
 - The maintenance of social order becomes vital for persons functioning at this level. At this stage of moral development, people consider society and people when making judgments. Therefore, following rules, doing one's duty, and respecting authority is pivotal in moral thinking.
3. At the post-conventional level, people understand abstract principles of morality. Kohlberg is convinced that only a small number of people reach this final stage. Two stages are evident for people functioning on this level:
 - Individual rights and social contracts are essential here.
 - In addition, law rules are crucial for preserving a society's fabric. Still, people on this level argue that community members should consent to the needed standards.
4. Kohlberg's final level of moral decision-making is based on the functioning of universal ethical principles and the realisation of abstract reasoning. At this stage, people want to follow internalised principles of justice even if it conflicts with laws and rules.

The visualisation of Kohlberg enables us to realise that much could be done to enable participants in the liturgy to become aware of the importance of moral decision-making. However, Pomytkina *et al.* (2018:4) posit that

decision-making is a complex process of human mental activity (also see Fabio & Bluestein 2010:13). Therefore, reflection about decisions has to do with a distinct cognitive process of understanding. This process includes understanding your actions, behaviour, and attitudes towards people (Izard 2011:22). This reflection will inevitably centre on your responsibility to society. Therefore, developing one's conscience should be recognised as an essential responsibility for forming morality (Rubinshtein 2000:33).

3.3 The formative power of liturgy around moral decision-making-perspectives as informed by the viewpoint of the philosophy of religion

In the earlier sections, the argument was stated that moral decision-making should be regarded as a dynamic process with numerous cognitive aspects to be considered. In this vein, Wolterstorff (1990:2), interested in the role of liturgical rituals from the viewpoint of the philosophy of religion, makes the statement that ethical action and Christian belief could not be separated. The influence of liturgy in enhancing thought patterns related to ethical conduct should not be overlooked (Also see Cockayne 2018:1.) Based on the renewed interest in the essence of liturgy, Benson (2013:22) argues that liturgy was never meant to be reduced only to that which is happening during a worship service, but that it should instead be embraced a phenomenon related to how people live. The indication of participants in the liturgy as *homo liturgicus* (cf. Cockayne (2018:2–3) is essential in our current discussion, as people are shaped by rituals that determine the kinds of things they love and, thus, the kind of people they are. In a similar vein, Smith (2009:3) states that liturgy is pervasive for all aspects of human life and should be seen as formative. Nikolajsen (2014:163) takes this argument one step further by positing that, within participation in the liturgy of a faith community, the lives of its members are shaped. According to Nikolajsen (2014:164), liturgical elements, including the sermon, interpret life for the participants so as for them to reimagine a liveable or ethical life with new perspectives. Therefore, communion between the participants in the liturgy enables them to understand the importance of a liveable life or a life based on sound ethical principles.

Landova (2019:6) emphasises the vital role of participating in the rituals of the liturgy because it influences ethical thinking (cognition) and moral

conduct. The formative power of the liturgy described in the paragraph above points to the notion that critical moral values are transmitted to the participants in the liturgy and that these should become part and parcel of everyday life. The work of Senn (1997:3) reinforces this when he denotes that participating in the rituals of the liturgy is nothing else than a unique pattern of behaviour that communicates a way of life that is consistent with the community of believers' values. I agree with Landova (2019:13) that before people act or make moral decisions, they should learn to see a moral life differently. Stubbs (2004:4) indicates in a similar vein that, through repetition of liturgical acts and rituals, participants look in the right direction for doing what is right. In this sense, liturgy can be described as the window of the Kingdom of God (Müller 2006:663 and Stubbs 2004:6). Brueggemann (1993:22) calls this process a counter-imagination of reality through the instrument of the liturgy, in accordance with which participants should see life differently. In this sense, participation in the liturgy could enable the participants to change their understanding (cognition) of the importance of decision-making to combat corruption at all levels.

Wolterstorff (2018:3) further reflects on the vital role of what he calls *acting liturgically*. After all, the formative power of liturgy is encapsulated in the fundamental essence of the rituals in which someone is engaged. Wolterstorff (2018:6) compares liturgy and drama and consequently coins the notion of liturgy as a communal drama. His understanding is not primarily on what is communicated in liturgical enactment but rather on the significance of people's participation in the liturgical elements with numerous dimensions related to this aspect. This relates to what is often referred to as the performative actions of participants in the liturgy. In Wolterstorff's understanding of this communal drama, God's speaking, which precedes human speaking, stands central (Wolterstorff 2018:8). God's discourse is now being extended to the participants in the liturgy. People's well-being (shalom) in society can now no longer be ignored within the context of acting liturgically (Havenga 2020:619).

3.4 Perspectives on the interplay between cognition, liturgy, and moral decision-making

Tenbrunsel et al. (2009:3–4) explain the difficulty of people’s cognitive functioning, namely that they erroneously believe they will behave ethically in a situation while they do not. Then they think they behaved ethically when they did not. This tendency is described as one’s self-serving perceptions according to Banaji, Bazerman & Chugh (2003:11). Rest (1994:40–44) makes a valuable point about moral cognition. Moral cognition, he avers, (Rest 1994:44–45), consists of four equally important components:

1. Thoughtfulness about morals.
2. Sensible thinking or reasoning about ethical matters.
3. Inducement or stimulus to be persuaded to act morally.
4. A moral disposition to rub off on other people.

The idea mentioned above on the moral cognition model has as its point of departure that your actions influence other people, and sensible thinking about it is needed (Jordan 2009:239). To cultivate moral development, sensitising people should result in reasoning and decision-making to discern practical wisdom (phronesis). The present article has engaged Kohlberg’s six stages of understanding what occurs in the moral reasoning phase within one’s mind. Much could be done in this vein to provide participants in the liturgy with a meaningful sense of what is needed in everyday life and cultivate growth in moral development. Although it is primarily on the level of an established and profound motivation to deliberate on morally acceptable aspects, people will later struggle in the absence of the appropriate explanation or reasons for forming a moral character focussed on a commitment to moral actions (Rest 1999:42). Moral reasoning¹⁰ is when people think about ethical dilemmas (Woolfolk 2007:98 and Fiske 2004:352). One should acknowledge that, within the ambit of the visualisations identified by Kohlberg as presented above, and

10 Fiske (2004:353) outlines the idea that moral reasoning includes interpretation of the situation the application of norms in action being taken, the evaluation of how actions could be functional moral values as well as the implementation thereof. One could say that it comes down to perspective making or perspective taking.

of the various levels of moral development that are evident in people's lives, they could come to different conclusions even at the same level of development due to distortions in their thoughts about morality (Wood & Wood 1999:328). For example, a person could argue that corruption to benefit one's family could not be seen as such. Or they could think that all people are involved in corruption; why not me, if my family and I are falling behind due to not participating in the corruption?

This article has further demonstrated that people could deceive themselves about their ethical conduct (Fiske 2004:353). It boils down to the complexity underlying this matter: people are convinced of and claim one moral rationale but act on another (Woolfolk 2007:97). Studying corrupt practices indicates that moral reasoning is often centred on post-hoc reasoning rather than a solid underlying rational motive (Mazza *et al.* 2020:2). This is the real difficulty around people's moral reasoning about corruption. They often justify their moral decisions retroactively (Wilson & Brekke 1994:56). This is precisely where liturgy and participation in liturgy come squarely into focus. Participation in the liturgy entails that the participants should be made aware of the importance of harmful effects of corruption and the moral values of the Kingdom that should become everyday practice. People are, after all, trying to make sense of their lives, their experiences, and other people's actions (Fiske 2004:36), and part of this sense-making is for the liturgy to encourage an improved everyday understanding of and grip on morality, as opposed to corruption.

Therefore, a sound and moral framework to combat cognitive corruption and corrupt practices for participants in liturgy should be cultivated. Liturgy could be highly effective when people use habitual structures to make sense of daily living. They utilise and understand new information by referencing familiar and old frames of reference (Fiske 2004:143). People understand the meaning of everyday life from their own engagement experiences in the liturgy and people telling them about reality (Anderson & Lindsay 1999:72).

4. Liturgical perspectives on liturgy and moral decision-making in defiance of cognitive distortions that underpin corruption

Around the functioning of a hermeneutical interaction between the descriptive and systemising aspects, as explained above, the following focal points emerge:

4.1 The formative power of liturgy on moral decision-making

Landova (2019:16) elucidates the unique interrelationship between repetitive participation in the rituals offered by liturgy and ethical thinking, that is, moral conduct. La Coste (2004:29) strikingly holds that liturgy is formative. In this view, liturgy includes all people's actions. While it is equally crucial that liturgy should help its participants to see and know God, it should also enable its participants to put themselves at his disposal. Consequently, the idea of a liturgy that encourages its participants to realise their responsibility at grassroots levels where corruption manifests itself should be emphasised. Liturgy is always aimed at changing people's attitudes and outlook on life. A three-fold movement in liturgical participation is identified by La Coste (2004:10):

1. With a view to the everyday life of being in the world.
2. To become new beings in the image of Christ in participating in the liturgy.
3. To return to serving our neighbours in an ethically sound manner.

One could therefore demarcate that liturgy is directed practically at everyday life. However, the dynamic of conscious experiences in people's thoughts entering liturgical space to experience value-added perspectives provided is beyond all doubt focussed on an ethical outlook on life. As a result, the arrow is directed at the space of the public domain. Now it goes along with a clear commitment to act and make decisions ethically consistent with the transforming message of the liturgy. Participation in the elements of liturgy, including blessings, singing, praying, Scripture reading, preaching, and giving of alms, are in this way practical and shape participants' lives (Nikolajsen 2014:163).

The elements of liturgy and rituals interpret the reality of life. Paul Ricoeur's framework of living hermeneutics springs to mind. It entails allowing the Gospel to present itself daily, but as the window of the Kingdom of God connected to the idea of moral responsibility in a culture characterised by corruption. When liturgy, especially the element of preaching, is focussed on enabling its participants to deal with daily challenges, including the resilient functioning of cognitive corruption and people's duty in decision-making, people's understanding (cognition) of the world and their social practices are shaped. Given my understanding of cognitive corruption, it is worrisome that, initially, corrupt acts may be motivated by intuition rather than sound reason and, therefore, may be done unintentionally with the excuse that the actions are not immoral. Therefore, liturgy has to help participants exercise its influence in everyday life. Liturgy, after all, shapes who we are by affecting how we situate ourselves in the world and the nature of our connections with the world. Without claiming that every week's liturgy and its elements should be arranged to address injustices such as corruption, it should be said that much more could be done to help participants increase their awareness of moral decision-making within the public domain.

4.2 Liturgy and increasing awareness of cognitive corruption

The vicious cycle caused by cognitive corruption leads to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Cognitive corruption is found almost everywhere and flourishes in every society in different forms (Anderson & Haywood 2009:20). Understanding this includes the honesty that it is easy to state that faith communities should combat corruption because of the harm caused to the most vulnerable. It is also easy to point out that the injustice of corruption should not prevail; something different should be given to assist participants in liturgy to focus on how it should be done. Furthermore, the oversimplified reference to the resilient culture of corruption that endangers society's social fibre should be accompanied by a practice-oriented or committed interest in moral renewal (cf. Vorster 2012:13).

Nevertheless, the enduring influence of corruption that invades all spheres of public life cannot be ignored. Liturgists should have open minds about cognitive distortions manifesting in people's minds. The underlying

cognitive distortions should be laid bare, not only in officials' minds but also in the mind of every participant in the liturgy. As a moral agent, a faith community has to deal with morals. In voicing the immoral essence of cognitive corruption, a faith community could also speak on behalf of vulnerable people. Liturgical enactment could help raise awareness of everyday moral decision-making and the harmful consequences of becoming involved in corrupt practices. The thoughts of Hauerwas (1983:42) come to mind: faith communities are communities of character, which entails that they don't "have" a social ethic but embody social ethics. Vorster (2012:41) highlights those participants should act as moral opinion or decision-makers on the grassroots level in society. A formative and influential contribution can be made here by communicating the values that underpin the faith community's identity and increasing awareness for moral decision-making. Cognitive distortions are not allowed to flourish since participants are involved in all spheres of society.

5. Conclusion

This article demarcates the importance of cognitive distortions in the functioning of cognitive corruption. The importance of decision-making based on moral principles has also been scrutinised. It shows that the interaction between descriptive and systemising perspectives prompts a preference for the materialising of decision-making at grassroots levels among liturgical participants. The voicelessness of leaders and leaders within faith communities about cognitive corruption has to be addressed. Participating in the liturgy and consequently conducting a liturgy focussed on ethical principles to be applied in everyday life should be regarded as a vital contribution that faith communities could make in combatting corruption. An ethics of care within the public domain entails that the liturgy's participants have to be faithful to their claim, namely a liturgical community committed to caring for South African society. One crucial mechanism of such caring is to engage a liturgy that will enable participants to be aware of the significance of decision-making and the functioning of cognitive distortions in their lives. As part of the prophetic voice that should be raised against corruption, a liturgical presence concerned with God's will could be described as a powerful voice favouring an approach

that combats cognitive corruption. It can be concluded that significant societal changes are usually realised one step at a time.

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