**Roots of Corruption**

***A Christian Philosophical Examination***

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Abstract

***At the root of the corruption problem is its moral and economic nature. The economic problem is a moral problem. Modern theories of corruption are usually empirical in nature. However, they are not without their ideological dimensions though in the modern scheme of things, a normative framework is usually not rationally entertained. Empiricism combined with materialism takes on the reins of economies; however, disregard of the spiritual will not bring any lasting solution. A vision of the absolute is needed. There are various ideologies and religions that provide some kind of a vision or the other. The biblical vision is both historical and prophetic as well. And, the Church is called to be the model of that vision in this pervert and corrupt world.***

The very term “corruption” indicates an aberration on, a departure from, and a violation of something essentially good. The idea of what is good, however, precedes the idea of its perversion. To decry corruption without accepting the original ideal that it contradicts is equal to boxing against the wind. One can only know something is corrupt if one possesses a clear vision of its ideal, perfect, and uncorrupted form. This was what Plato attempted to do in *The Republic*; he attempted to paint a clear picture of what justice is, in essence, to avoid all the confusion that went to the extent of justifying injustice as just. It landed him in the theory of forms and ideas, of course, and prompted him to prescribe that no one should sit in a place of political authority unless he or she has first had a clear vision of the ideas (or, let’s say, the ideal). While some would disagree on this point, one can’t disagree that to claim corruption as an evil is to make a statement about morality.

This paper aims to first unravel the moral-economic roots of corruption and then philosophically look at a few theories of corruption. While at the heart of corruption is the problem of sin, this cannot be an excuse for not looking at political solutions to the problem of corruption itself. There have been (and are) political instances where the level of corruption was low, which indicates that a corruption-free polity is a possibility. Also, the divine institution of political authority was for the purpose of ensuring justice (Romans 13:1-7), which would be nonsensical if it weren’t practical. So, there is hope. Now, it is not necessary that such a political authority were Christian in faith in order to administer justice. The concept of justice is something that is recognized universally as an eternal and rational category. For instance, the natives of Malta in Acts 28:4 knew that no man could flee from the purview of justice; and they knew this before the gospel was preached to them. So, it is certainly possible to make a philosophical investigation of the issue of corruption. As such, we will here look at the root-elements of corruption (*viz.,* the moral and economic roots) and also take a look at some research issues and theories of corruption.

**Moral and Economic Roots**

Corruption is a moral problem that has social and economic dimensions. Aristotle had already made that qualification when he announced to the world in his *Politics* that ethics and politics go hand in hand. His teacher, Plato, had in fact constructed the ideal *Republic* only to understand the meaning of justice in the ethical human individual. Yet, the ethical question is a disturbing one. Can one really talk about ethics and ideals in a rational tone? One remembers the famous Russell-Copleston debate in which Copleston tried to counter Russell by raising the question of the moral law. He asked how Russell distinguished between right or wrong. Russell replied that he could do that in the same way that he could distinguish between blue and yellow. Copleston countered: Russell distinguished between blue and yellow on the basis of sight; how did he distinguish between right and wrong. On the basis of feelings, replied Russell. Of course, he then went on to qualify that there could be individuals who have faulty eyesight (are color blind or jaundiced) and so see a not-yellow object as yellow.[[1]](#endnote-1) But, then, can we also speak of corruption on the same nerve? Is there an absolute ideal which forms the basis to our diagnosis of corruption; or is it just a matter of subjective intuition? If corruption is not a moral problem at all, then it is not a problem that must demand justice at all. But, then, if morals aren’t absolute, our entire striving against corruption is ultimately absurd.

Arnold Heidenheimer and Michael Johnston have shown that the question of diagnosis is a very subtle one. The very question of how corruption is to be defined is a highly debated one.[[2]](#endnote-2) A man of such a stature as Francis Bacon is said to have justified his corrupt practices on the argument that everyone did it. He was the unlucky one who got caught.[[3]](#endnote-3) In other words, if the whole system is corrupt then is it justifiable for a particular individual to be caught and tried? Of course, just because every thief in the world cannot be caught (or has not been caught) doesn’t mean that a caught thief is not punished? Bacon’s response also falters on the majority-justification line that Russell was holding on to. Didn’t Russell himself ask Copleston, “Why do we intellectually condemn the color-blind man? Isn't it because he's in the minority?” If morality is not an objective issue then good and evil are matters of majority consensus. Thrasymachus, in Plato’s *The Republic,* had struck a deeper nerve when he argued that justice was the advantage of the stronger (and, “the stronger” could mean the wealthy, the mighty, or the majority). On the reverse, it may also be argued that it is only the stronger that have the advantage of administering justice. Thus, in a monarchy, a just king would have a regime of justice, while in a democracy a people (majority) committed to justice will assure justice. But, is that possible? That is a question that political theorists have to decide. In the present situation in India, however, at least, there seems to be a conflict of opinions. On the one hand we have those like Anna Hazare who believe that right laws alone would suffice; while those like Arvind Kejriwal believe that there can be no victory without political power (which seems to indicate his belief that politics is corrupt but people (that is, those who are not in power) aren’t corrupt, and majority vote for the right representatives should solve the problem). Of course, Anna is said to have interpreted Arvind’s move as prompted by greed and not need,[[4]](#endnote-4) but each would have his own rationale for the calculated steps one takes.

The economic nature of the problem cannot be neglected. When we talk of corruption in administrative or political situations, we usually have its economic dimension in mind. Kautilya or Chanakya (c. 370–283 BCE) had gone ahead to name his treatise on politics as *Arthashastra* (*Economics).* Money plays an important role in the whole issue of corruption. But, as the Apostle Paul pointed out, it is not money in itself but the lust for money that is the root of all evil. The Catholic Church listed greed among the seven deadly sins and called it *avaritia*, from which is derived our English word “avarice,” which Cambridge Dictionary defines as “an extremely strong want to get or keep money or possessions”. There are those who attempt to justify corruption on empirical and pragmatic bases, some going to the extent of even saying that corruption functions as the grease of economic growth.[[5]](#endnote-5) Recent empirical findings, however, point in a different direction: corruption is not seen as grease but as sand on the wheels of growth.[[6]](#endnote-6) However, to look at phenomenal growth at the expense of moral degradation is a costly affair.

In his paper “Corruption: Causes, Consequences, and Cures”, [[7]](#endnote-7) Burmese economist U Myint proposes a corruption equation that predicts corruption as a result of economic and political opportunity minus accountability. The equation is:

**C = R + D – A**

In the above equation, C stands for Corruption, R for Economic Rent, D for Discretionary Powers, and A for Accountability. Economic rent, shortly defined, is monopoly profit; in other words, it is the extra profit that someone tries to earn due to his or her advantageous position. For instance, if a peon doesn’t forward your file, it may never reach the desk of the manager; so, he seeks some extra profit out of his advantageous position (it is his rent seeking activity). Suppose that peon also possesses some discretionary powers to decide whose file to forward and whose not, then the sum of his powers and position add up to a high potential for corruption. If, further on, there is no proper mechanism to hold the peon accountable for his actions, then his powers are almost absolute; and, power without accountability tends towards corruption. In the words of Lord Acton, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Suppose such unaccountable discretionary powers and position are given to administrators, one can imagine what havoc corruption would let loose on the nation.

In Myint’s own words “The equation states that the more opportunities for economic rent (R) exist in a country, the larger will be the corruption. Similarly, the greater the discretionary powers (D) granted to administrators, the greater will be the corruption. However, the more administrators are held accountable (A) for their actions, the less will be the corruption, and hence a minus sign in front of A.”[[8]](#endnote-8)

Inherent in such an equation is also the well-known definition of corruption, viz. “the abuse of public office for private or personal gain.”[[9]](#endnote-9) However, such a definition tends to be lop-sided as it fails to take into consideration the other partner in the crime, for instance the man who bribes the official in order to get his work done. Of course, in certain situations the moral determination of the other party’s position might become difficult, for usually he might be in a situation where he has to choose between two evils: either to not get his work done or to bribe the official and get his work done. But, in the same vein, there can be the argument that bribery and graft become essential in order to compensate for the low salary. In other words, it is the government that is to blame and the solution for the latter problem can only be possible if the salary is raised. However, will higher salaries put an end to the economic problem of wants above need? We are searching in troubled waters here. U Myint drives a probing needle into the corruption vein when he observes that “The line between “need driven” and “greed driven” corruption is hard to draw and it is difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Real accountability must have a subjective dimension of moral commitment, or else the stringent rules to ensure accountability will only keep piling up and accomplish nothing. No wonder the slave owners of the Roman period desired to have slaves that were Christians because these were known for their faithfulness to their masters based on their accountability in love to Jesus their Lord.

In the modern scheme of understanding, corruption is defined as an interest (private or public) that is out of place or is in the wrong place. For instance, in the words of Mary Douglas[[11]](#endnote-11), “Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dinning-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing…”; similarly, when public interests and private interests are confused in roles and place, corruption or dirt is perceived. Thus, “Private interests and public interests are both perfectly fine, as long as they stay in their proper places. Once we have the contamination of the public by the private, politicians and politics itself become dirty, tainted, infected, and thus corrupt.”[[12]](#endnote-12) But, doesn’t the shoe and food analogy also suggest that our definitions of what is corrupt might only be culturally relative. Thus, if a culture thinks that a particular practice, say placing shoes on the dining-table, is not out of place, then it is not out of place in that culture at least. In that sense, the definition loses its absolute definitive basis and is universally not necessarily applicable. Peter Bratsis makes a penetrating observation on this classificatory definition when he says, “…if the main function of the concept of corruption is to maintain the purity of the categories of the public and private, one would expect that the question of corruption should be exclusively a domestic affair and one of no particular importance to international organizations or far flung corporations and financial institutions.”[[13]](#endnote-13) Evidently, the issue of moral absolutes can’t be separated from the issue of economic function.

Also, if the economic problem is defined to be allocation of resources, then it also becomes an ethical problem because “allocation” involves decision-making and choice. The economic problem is not that there is a scarcity of resources and multiplicity of wants and desires. The problem is a problem of choice that arises out of limited means and unlimited wants. As a result, the aim of an economic administrator (the ruler)[[14]](#endnote-14) becomes to increase allocative efficiency and ensure economic justice. The goal is to bring justice into the economic structure of the polity.

Thus, we can state that the problem of corruption is an ethical problem that involves morally accountable allocation of resources to bring economic justice into the political system.

But, while who an individual is ultimately accountable to can be easily answered, who or what a state or polity is accountable to is a problematic question in itself. But, does that matter? Yes, it does if we consider the issue of “justice” to be absolute and not merely relative. But, if it’s not absolute, then the problem is a mere passing phenomena, a phantom appearance that need raise no concern. I think it is the corrupt that believe corruption to be an unreality that bears no personal stings; and, the criminal always hopes that the thing will pass away as a forgettable dream – only the fruits he profited will remain, but which ones? An evil tree can’t bring forth good fruit.

**Theories of Corruption**

Theories of corruption may be classified into three divisions based on the approach that they undertake to understand and find a solution to the problem:

1. Empirical Theories
2. Ideological Theories
3. Hermeneutical Theories

***Empirical Theories***

These are the present day more popular ones and feature results based on analysis of empirical data collected by various means. The theories integrate the fields of sociological research, economic research, and psychological research in order to study the causes, nature, and extent of corruption in order to be able to measure, to predict, to control, and, if possible, to eliminate instances or possibility of the same.

The value of empirical studies is great. Not only do they help to observe the phenomenon but also to map it variously, for instance, geographically, politically, and economically. One example of such mapping can be found on the website of *Transparency International,* an international organization that claims to be working in over 100 countries to fight against corruption.[[15]](#endnote-15) The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), for instance, is an index of the perceived levels of public-sector corruption in various countries of the world. In the words of the organization, the Index “draws on different assessments and business opinion surveys carried out by independent and reputable institutions. The surveys and assessments used to compile the index include questions relating to the bribery of public officials, kickbacks in public procurement, embezzlement of public funds, and questions that probe the strength and effectiveness of public-sector anti-corruption efforts.”[[16]](#endnote-16) The CPI 2011 listed 183 countries according their global corruption ranking; the level of corruption being indicated on colored graphs – dark red indicating the most corrupt country and light blue (or light yellow in one page) indicating the cleanest one as perceived. The Index lists New Zealand as the cleanest, with a score of 9.5, and North Korea and Somalia as the most corrupt, with a score of 1.0 each.

Observation does help one to recognize the tree by its fruit and, in many cases, discover and formulate an equation that might help to measure and predict corruption. Empirical studies done cross-country wise bring in more breadth to the research. In-depth analysis becomes possible as more variables are identified, probed, and included in the formulation of theories. Economists have constructed complex models based on such research. However, empirical studies are not without their problems.

One problem associated with empirical research is the issue of causal inference. Contrary to deductive research which leads to conclusions that can be necessarily drawn, inductive research faces the dangers of irrelevant or missing variables and improper correlations between them. Usually the question is the old age problem of trying to ascertain which came first, the chicken or the egg.

In his paper “Corruption in Empirical Research – A Review”,[[17]](#endnote-17) German Economist Johann Graf Lambsdorff reviews some theories of corruption based on empirical studies and notes a few problems of causal correlations. He writes, “Whether corruption causes other variables or is itself the consequence of certain characteristics is sometimes difficult to assess.”[[18]](#endnote-18) He goes on to look at some case studies where government involvement, poor institutions, inequality and absence of competition may go along with corruption, but suggests to “refrain from drawing iron-clad conclusions with respect to causalities.” For instance, he cites the case of Treisman[[19]](#endnote-19) finding significant evidence for the theory that federal states are more corrupt than centralized ones. But this relationship is said to have fallen to insignificance when other variables were included. Also, as seen earlier, there are empirical disagreements with regard to the debate whether corruption acts as necessary grease that eliminates red-tape and boosts economic efficiency or acts as sand on the wheels of economic growth. In short, simple conclusions cannot be drawn so easily. After an investigation of correlations between a number of variables like GDP, government expenditure, FDIs, international trade, public institutions, and cultural determinants, he concludes:

In a recent wave of empirical studies the causes and consequences of corruption have been investigated. It can be concluded that corruption commonly goes along with policy distortions, inequality of income and lack of competition. But to derive clear arguments with respect to causality is rather difficult. On the one hand, corruption may cause these variables but is at the same time likely to be the consequence of them.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Perhaps, one reason behind this difficulty is the need of an understanding of human nature. Human actions cannot always be mathematically calculated along deterministic lines. However, human freewill is open; so, one can’t have a closed theory to predict anything. The most that may be done is use a probability equation.

Also, empirical positivism doesn’t provide a way to account for moral decisions. Bertrand Russell was frank to admit this empirical insufficiency to Copleston when he said, “Well, why does one type of object look yellow and another look blue? I can more or less give an answer to that thanks to the physicists, and as to why I think one sort of thing good and another evil, probably there is an answer of the same sort, but it hasn't been gone into in the same way and I couldn't give it [to] you.” The empiricists themselves had long abandoned the normative function of philosophical ethics and committed themselves to metaethics or the descriptive and analytical study of moral language.

Yet, the descriptive and analytical nature of empirical research is not without its normative dimensions. As has been stated, unless there is a clear picture of the ideal of a healthy system, there will not be a way of even describing a corrupt system. As Bratsis notes,

On the one hand we have a normative political project that posits what the good is and on this basis is able to establish what is corrupt/bad. On the other hand we have the desirable/undesirable distinction established in a more technocratic and underhanded way. The proper ordering of all things social is posited in the form of ontological assumptions regarding the public/private and phenomenon that pose a challenge to this vision of how things are become branded as corrupt.[[21]](#endnote-21)

However, the impact of the empirical is such that in the present scheme of things, the normative could not usually be given its proper place. And so, “Characteristically, most contemporary discussions of political corruption within political science occur within the sub-field of comparative politics, not normative political theory.”[[22]](#endnote-22)

Empirical findings do have the power to pull down age-old systems; but, they do not possess the power to give birth to a normative political theory. That prerogative lies in the domain of ideological thinking. Empirical findings can only measure corruption on the basis of the ideals provided by rational or hermeneutical models.

***Ideological Theories***

At the heart of political revolutions is always some motivating ideology that defines the nature, form, direction, and extent of that particular revolution. Ideologies provide the framework with reference to which aspirations, achievements, and the thrust and nature of revolution can be measured. In *Europe in Retrospect (1979)*, Raymond F. Betts describes ideology as “the secular equivalent of theology”. In his chapter on the French Revolution, he writes:

What was ideology? It was and remains a system of ideas that are usually goal- directed. Thus, it is a theoretical explanation of the world's situation and a prescription for improvement or radical change of that situation… Most ideologies are, therefore, fundamentally political, bright descriptions of the means and methods by which the instruments of revolution, party, or government ought be used for the purpose of social change.

Ideology is, in a way, the secular equivalent of theology. It directs the believer's attention to a perfected future when present woes will have dissipated and social harmony will reign.[[23]](#endnote-23)

The literature of political theories is quite large. A few major ones that hold relevance to the issue at hand have been selected here.

*Absolute Ideals/Justice*

Prominent among the political philosophers is Plato. His political ideal *The Republic* is spun on the axle of his central theory of the ideas. The health of the state, according to him, depends on the grip that the ideas (laws and ideals[[24]](#endnote-24)) have on the governance of the state. Therefore, censorship of literature (to prevent corrupt ideals) plays a very important role in public governance.[[25]](#endnote-25) The rulers/guardians are those who must embody the knowledge of these absolutes that provide clarity of vision and ensure justice to all in the Republic. Consequentially, his theory required that the guardians possess no private property or family; they hold all things in common. In that way, he tried to do away with the whole issue of private interests in the public offices. Plato’s guardians, however, go through such rigorous training programs that make it almost impossible for them to fall and become corrupt. Corruption is injustice and the result of an improper ordering in the strata of leadership. Justice is when each member is in his right place – e.g. when only the philosophically trained are the leaders, the militarily trained are the soldiers, etc. Plato’s view would not accept a democracy in which anybody can be voted to become a leader.

From a Christian viewpoint, while there may be disapproval of the platonic “world of ideas” as such, an understanding of eternal reality versus the temporal world of shadows is certainly emphasized in the New Testament (Colossians 3:1; 2Corinthians 4:18; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). The concept of the Ideal Guardian (Biblically, the King-Priest) of whom the earthly are mere shadows finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Shepherds of people on earth and Husbands or Heads of family at home are to reflect Christ.

With respect to the riddance of the private/public interests, however, Plato’s disciple Aristotle has a practical critique.

*Common Interests*

Plato’s disciple Aristotle thought his teacher’s prescriptions on rulers to be too impractical and unnecessary. In Book II of his *Politics*, he says that members of a state can either have (1) all things in common or (2) nothing in common or (3) some things in common and some not. To have nothing in common is antithetical to the very concept of the constitution as a community. But, to have all things in common is considered to be quite impracticable. In fact, to have all things in common is equally antithetical to the concept of state; for, to have all things in common would result in a unity by which the essential plurality of the state would be destroyed, resulting in a big family rather than a state.[[26]](#endnote-26) According to Aristotle, if all things are in common, then a general carelessness and neglect is bound to follow leading to the degeneration of the state. He defines a state as “a body of citizens sufficing for the purposes of life.”[[27]](#endnote-27) To him, the “end of the state is the good life… And the state is the union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life, by which we mean a happy and honourable life.”[[28]](#endnote-28) The three forms of government are royalty (one ruler), aristocracy (few rulers), and constitutional government (many rulers). The three perversions of them are: of royalty, tyranny; of aristocracy, oligarchy; and of constitutional government, democracy.[[29]](#endnote-29) Consequentially, public interests are violated in tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy – “For tyranny is a kind of monarchy which has in view the interest of the monarch only; oligarchy has in view the interest of the wealthy; democracy, of the needy: none of them the common good of all.”[[30]](#endnote-30) Basic to the thinking of Aristotle is the defining role of “interests”. No doubt, his ethics posited happiness as the end of life. A happy state is one in which there is a right balance of interests and the government such that the happiness of all is ensured. Corruption and corrupt government go together. In a democracy, many have the opportunity to be corrupt. By Aristotelian definition, modern day Communism is nothing but the democracy of the working class.

Biblically, as well, we find a number of governmental forms in the Bible. There was a time of the Patriarchs, then the Judges, then the Kings; then, in the New Testament, the ecclesiastical leadership of elders or presbyters. While royalty was a permissive form of government for Israel, the Bible does also point out, in the Book of Daniel for instance, that the authority is divinely appointed. Time and again, however, corruption is seen as happening when the leaders (kings, elders, priests) turn away from justice and practice iniquity for dishonest gain (Micah 7:3). Essentially, justice is the biblical goal of governance.

*Natural/Rational Rights*

The concepts of natural liberty and division of labor play important roles in Adam Smith’s (1723-1790) *The Wealth of the Nations (1776)* that laid down the principles of modern capitalistic economies. The roots, however, go back to the time of the Reformation when Martin Luther (1483-1546) drew a theological division between the Church and the State and freedom of religion was looked at as a personal and absolute right. His arguments were simple: since religion is a private matter, it “is futile and impossible to command or compel anyone by force to believe this or that.” Also, “every man runs his own risk in believing as he does, and he must see to it himself that he believes rightly….How he believes or disbelieves is a matter for the conscience of each individual, and since this takes nothing away from the temporal authority the latter should be content to attend to its own affairs and let men believe this or that as they are able and willing, and constrain no one by force. For faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Luther’s statements favor a form of individualism and it has been noted that the idea “of capitalism grew from individualistic notions. In religion, this led to the Reformation. In politics, this led to democracy, and with the economy, this led to the capitalistic system.”[[32]](#endnote-32) The chief concept, greatly elaborated by John Locke (1632-1704) prior to Smith, was the concept of “natural rights”. The ideas of John Locke helped spark the French Revolution and the American Revolution. Natural law is seen as different from both positive law (enforced by humans) and divine law (declared by religion). It can be discovered by reason and applies to all people. The three natural rights are the right to life, right to liberty, and right to estate. A healthy state is that in which the rights of all the citizens are protected. Justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity go together. A corrupt state is that in which people are exploited by those in power through rent-seeking activities.

*Utility*

The post-Enlightenment period gradually saw the rise of skepticism and the waning of rationalistic influences. Empiricism began to take over the reins of philosophy as belief in rational absolutes began to be cast away. Truth became relative and pragmatic. Utilitarianism began to define the use and disuse of law. A few decades after the French *Declaration of Rights (1791),* Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), a British jurist, declared that the concept of natural rights was a contradiction in terms. In his own words, “*Natural rights* is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, -- nonsense upon stilts.”[[33]](#endnote-33) He saw in the revolution, spurred by these anarchical concepts of rights, the seeds of perpetual insurrections.[[34]](#endnote-34)

To Bentham, basing law on “natural” rights was equal to giving room for lawlessness. His rejection of this foundation led to the development of the modern concept of positive law (or law enacted by government). *A priori* definitions of laws were untenable. Experience and utility would decide the making of laws. Even liberty is no good if it is not instrumental in bringing about the good. No law is a rigid absolute; it is only instrumental towards welfare and may need to be changed in time. The defining factor was happiness; and the very notion of the law carried with it the notion of happiness for all. But “happiness” according to Bentham has no essential meaning. It is simply the experience of pleasure and the lack of pain.

In the modern pluralistic world of global relations and trade, “natural” rights is a debatable issue. For what appears to be “natural” to one cultural/religious group might not be accepted as such by another. Utilitarianism and Legal Positivism present an alternative. But, they are dangerous alternatives, because they have dealt a death-blow to the concept of an *a priori* “ought”.

*Community*

For Karl Marx (1818-1883) evil is systemic and economic. A system (e.g. capitalism) that encourages class division is inherently evil. A working class that becomes conscious of being exploited will soon take action against the ruling class. However, the struggle is perpetual unless there is a communist revolution and the division of public and private is abolished. Both Marx and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) architected *The Communist Manifesto (1848)* in which they envisioned:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.[[35]](#endnote-35)

The ideal society according to them then is that in which “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” However, a focus on mere materialistic development in antagonism to anything metaphysical or religious only misses the difference between humanity and organism.

***Hermeneutical Theories***

Hermeneutical theories are theories based on an interpretation of authoritative statements that have claims of “revelatory” or “oracular” status. Usually every religious theology has some explanation about corruption in both existential and eschatological terms. For instance, Jainism talks about the cycle of time in which there is first a decline of morals (*Avasarpini)* and then ascension of morals (*Utsarpini*). Hinduism talks about the four ages (*Yugas*) through which morality falls to perfect demise and is salvaged only through an act of the deity. The four *Yugas* are *Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapar Yuga,* and *Kali Yuga.* *Kali Yuga* is the age of demonic vice and Hindus believe that we’re presently living in that age. Islam envisions *Jihad* as the means of putting an end to all unrighteousness and ushering in the Kingdom of God, while Christianity anticipates an aggravation of evil towards the end of the age climaxing in the reign of the Anti-Christ who is the epitome of the mystery of iniquity. Evil men will get worse and the growth of evil will only be curbed through the intervention of Jesus Christ and escaped through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.

**Biblical Solutions**

There are three ways in which we can biblically approach the issue of corruption: watching, witnessing, and waiting.

**1. Watching.** This group of instructions focuses on a believer’s role as one who is divinely wise and capable of identifying and keeping away from evil. Regardless of whether it is a royalty or an aristocracy or a constitutional government, or one of their perversions, the biblical call is to identify evil and keep away from it. Psalm 1 and Proverbs 1 are examples of instructions to watchfulness. Proverbs 28 is a classic example of sayings that strongly discourage corrupt practices. The Mosaic Law stipulated, “you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.” (Exodus 23:8). According to Ecclesiastes 7:7, bribe debases the heart. Sadly in Micah 7:3, corruption is seen as having entered the ministry.

Watchfulness also includes responsible study and perceptiveness of what is going in the political and economic world around. The light is given to us through the Scriptures. The Bible doesn’t call us to be unrelated to the function of the world. It was Joseph’s economic solution that saved Egypt and the world around in times of trouble. We are called to wakefulness and wise living.

The Christian ruler is a watchman appointed by God. Like a shepherd who watches over his flocks and a watchman who watches over the city, he is to watch over his people. A watchman who gets drunk and dissipated with the pleasures of the world and who begins to exploit his flocks and loot his city instead of guarding it is corrupt and a vessel of dishonor. This applies to both leaders in Church as well as Christian leaders in the market place and public offices.

**2. Witnessing.** The Bible does talk of the possibility of reformation and restoration. However, anything that is stagnant is soon going to rot. Reformation and restoration are to be living experiences of the people. But, there can be no reforms without witnessing. Ideas bring changes. Wrong ideas bring wrong changes and right ideas bring right changes. Without a right vision, the people will perish. The Church is given the responsibility to be the light of the world. Several times the Bible exhorts the Church to hold out the word of truth in this crooked generation, to live out the word of truth by escaping the corruption in the world, and to move out to expose sin and testify of righteousness (Philippians 2:15,16; 2Peter 1:4; Ephesians 5:6-10). Of course, there is that debate of total depravity or total incapability; however, there is that consensus as well that Christians are called to be agents of change and transformation in this world. And, it begins with us.

Witnessing, however, doesn’t mean just evangelism. The Bible records the stories of people such as Joseph, Esther, and Daniel to show us examples of what it means to be salt and light in the world. These people were so strong in faith that they influenced the laws of the nations. However, if the salt itself has lost its savor, what could it be salted with again?

**3. Waiting.** The Bible does have an eschatological vision for the world. The two mysteries at work in the world are the mystery of godliness and the mystery of iniquity. The mystery of iniquity will climax in the advent of the Anti-Christ who is also called the Man of Lawlessness. In him and his government, evil will epitomize. However, the mystery of godliness will swallow up iniquity; for the mystery of godliness will find its Bright and Morning Star of a new beginning in the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ who will destroy the Man of Lawlessness and judge the world with righteousness. Until then, the believers are called to be faithful to the purity of the word and work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

**Final Remarks**

This paper made an attempt to look at the roots and causes of corruption. We noted that the roots are moral and economic. If they weren’t moral then corruption would not invite the attention of justice. There are some theorists, however, who disregard the moral aspect by claiming that morality can’t be a root because morality has no intrinsic value; it is relative. Some tried to interpret it all in mere materialistic terms; some in humanistic terms. Some have mocked the issue of “natural rights” as being nonsense. But if absolutes are a nonsense, then we’re also assembled together to merely discuss a nonsense. The economic problem is essentially a moral one. The function of the Law, according to the Bible, is to restrain evil by the rod of justice (1Timothy 1:9). However, it is only useful when people use it lawfully (1Timothy 1:8). Biblical history teaches us that Israel fell into corruption many times despite the presence of the Law.

The biblical vision of liberty is when the law is written in human hearts and the earth is filled with the glory of God. Finally, we live in the world not to be derelicts but to be the salt and light in our own community; to be paragons of excellence in the virtues of love, hope, faith, courage, temperance, justice, and prudence. It is not a pessimistic picture, but a bright and glorious one. Truth alone triumphs!

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