

A CORRUPTION FREE SOCIETY A New Way of God's Reign in Our Midst

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1. The Context of Corruption in India

Often people take it for granted and say, "Oh! Corruption is present everywhere." But to know and understand this phenomenon, we need the support of certain scientific studies and reliable reports and news. In 2011, in the scale of world corruption, India is ranked 95 out of 178 countries.¹ Such information speaks volumes about the corruption in India. Yes, corruption is a great road block to the development and growth of India today. It has enveloped almost all the structures of the Indian nation, namely, political, social, economic, cultural, educational, health, and military, making the criminals and the rich richer and the poor poorer.

It is unfortunate and sad that at present in Indian political life we have leaders who are corrupt and remain as the sources of corruption: "As of December 2008, 120 of India's 522 parliament members were facing criminal charges. Many of the biggest scandals since 2010 have involved very high levels of government, including Cabinet Ministers and Chief Ministers, such as in the 2G spectrum scam, the 2010 commonwealth Games scam and the Adarsh Housing

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¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_in_India

Society scam, mining scandal in Karnataka and cash for vote scam.”² One need not wonder that the system of judiciary has also become corrupt today though only a few cases have come to the limelight.

Corruption in India has become part of the cultural life and of an acceptable practice in day-to-day life. To get a job in the state or central Government people have to pay bribe for it. To start an educational institution people need to pay certain amount to persons in administration as well as to the ruling class. Irrespective of the party in power, from top to bottom, for any work or favour to be done, people have to grease the palm of politicians or persons in some position or power.

2. The Causes of Corruption

In their working paper, Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny present two reasons for corruption. First is the structure of the government institutions and the political process. The second is the process of taxation as an important factor responsible for the level of corruption.³

Over and above these two, we find that there are other factors responsible for corruption in our country. The present electoral system in India is yet another cause for breeding of corruption. The politicians need plenty of money to win the elections. Mostly the people who own the corporate sector pay them and in turn they expect them to grant licenses to their industries. Moreover there are greedy officers who receive bribes to complete a particular work on time or to make special favours.

Given the vastness of India, we need a strong political will guided and guarded by a stringent legal system which is supported by a strict administrative system to curb corruption. But we do not see today anything concretely happening in this direction. This is because it is said that many of our political leaders have black money in foreign countries either in banks or invested in companies and properties. Moreover we do not have good moral leaders who speak against corruption and also we do not have leaders who are interested in developing a comprehensive system that controls corruption vigilantly and brings the transgressors to book.

In the educational sector we have some irresponsible professors, teachers and students who leak out the question papers before the

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_in_India

³ Andrei Shleifer, Robert W. Vishny, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 108, 3 (August 1993) 599.

exams and make money out of them. Some pay money to the teachers to get more marks. Without really studying, people buy degrees by paying for it. Many seek for jobs but only a few are available. Therefore there are people who are ready to pay bribe and get jobs. All these activities lead to black money and corruption.

In India, there are many Gurus who receive money from the rich and wealthy persons, but often neither the money is accounted for nor the donor interested in asking for a receipt. In the same way the different religious leaders do not come forward openly to condemn corruption in public.

We do not have many NGOs with clean record and country-wide net working to fight corruption. However we need to appreciate Anna Hazare and his recent movement with fasting on 5 April 2011 to pressurise the Indian Government to bring a strong Jan Lokpal against corruption. Mention must be made here that Anna Hazare himself is accused of corrupt practices.⁴ Moreover we do not find many committed men and women of good will who can spend time with people all over the country to conscientize them to fight against corruption at all levels. With these we may have many more reasons to explain why corruption exists in the public life of India.

3. God's Reign and Corruption Free Society

Jesus begins his ministry with the saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Reign of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15). Repentance is an invitation to all humans to correct their sinful ways that affect them in their relationship with their neighbour and God. The God of Jesus expects every human to be reconciled with one's neighbour and makes this as a precondition for the reconciliation with God.

The Reign of God understood this way, the practice of corruption affects first and foremost the poor at all levels, because the money that is in circulation due to corruption is meant for the protection and development of the poor. The money otherwise would have been paid to the state and the state in turn used the same for the development of the poor. But it is now blocked. The unpaid tax, the unaccounted black money of all kinds in every transaction pushes the poor more and more to the periphery of society. What is planned and

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Hazare_and_Accusation_of_corruption: In September 2003, Maharashtra Government had instituted a commission under Justice PB Sawant who presented report that 'Hind Swaraj Trust' headed by Hazare spent Rs. 2.20 lakhs of its funds on the birth day celebration of Hazare.

done against the poor is a stumbling block to the arrival of the Reign of God and it is against God.⁵

Jesus explains the meaning⁶ of the Reign of God through parables and proverbs⁷ and also shows the way to realise it. He himself experiences the opposition from others who are religiously, socially and politically powerful, whose world views, projects and action programmes are against the values of the Reign of God. Thus the values of the Reign of God not only confront the hearers, but they are also being confronted by them. When the values of the Reign of God are accepted and practised by the hearers, it is a sign that the Reign of God has come near to them and God reigns in human hearts and there is no rich and the poor, there is no master and servant, and there is no oppressor and the oppressed. All accept that all are the children of the same Father in heaven. Thus the arrival of the Reign of God creates a new society which is corruption free.

All preaching, teaching and action programmes of Jesus were centred on the Reign of God. In healing, in driving away devils, working miracles, Jesus overcame the power of evil. Evil appears and works in many forms: sickness, pain, death, demon-possession, personal and structural sins and the maintaining of special class and caste privileges, the brokenness of human relationships. Jesus is however saying: "If human distress takes many forms, the power of God does likewise."⁸

Jesus made all round attack on evil. When the Reign of God comes, the Reign of the Evil goes. The driving out of devils and healing of the sick are not merely individual events but aimed at purifying men

⁵ George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ, *A Biblical Theology for India* Vol.2, ed. with an introduction by Scaria Kuthirakkattel, SVD, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, 1999, 34. "A 'religious' reading of the Gospels which fails to discover the profound social concern which lies at the heart of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom, will not be a Christian reading; and a 'social' reading which eliminated the religious concerns rooted in India's religiosity from its vision of a new humanity, will not be truly Indian."

⁶ Ripoll Francis, "The Beatitudes of the Kingdom," *Bible Bhashyam*, 10 (June 1984) 85. While explaining the role of parables in the teachings of Jesus, Ripoll says that, "In the Parables Jesus describes the nature of the Kingdom in all its aspects ..."

⁷ Raja Rao T.J., "Proverbs Jesus Used in the Gospel According to Matthew," *Jeevadhara*, 20 (March 1990) 130. While commenting on the parables and the proverbs, Rao says that the use of parables and proverbs by Jesus is a "pedagogical technique in presenting the Good News of the Kingdom effectively and in an entirely new manner" (Page, 141). It is "perhaps without these proverbs the new teaching might not have sounded new at all."

⁸ J. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1995, 32-33.

and women as individuals and transforming the evil structures of society. He lays the foundation for the Reign of God, and wishes one day the Reign of God to be completely realised in and through the work of God and the continuation of the mission by his disciples and the followers. He himself is the first Missionary and martyr for the Reign of God.

4. Jesus' Experience of God as Abba

In his baptism at the river of Jordan, Jesus experienced God as Abba. It was a foundational experience for him. It is this experience which is the basis for the Reign of God. All those who accept Jesus and follow him are made by the same Spirit of God sons and daughters of the same Father. They form a community which is built on the values of the Reign of God.

The community, on the one hand, undertakes many ministries to do good and promote life and on the other hand to uproot and fight all that is evil and all that leads to destruction of life. The members give the first place to others and choose the last. They choose to serve others rather than to be served. They do not like to be praised in the public but they always speak well of others. They are ready to forgive their enemies and sincerely pray for them. They have learnt to love and serve God by loving and serving their neighbour. Thus the new commandment of love of the neighbour is the basic principle, guiding light and supporting life breath of the community.

5. Jesus' Experience of Evil as *Mammona*

Jesus became aware of the forces of evil that was operative in the lives of the people which was totally against of Abba experience. Jesus called it *mammona*. (It is an Aramaic word. It means riches and wealth which are opposed to God). It is the spirit of Evil that drives people with selfishness to accumulate wealth in the forms of land, investments, properties both mobile and immobile of all kinds at the expense of ill paid wages and salaries to others. One of the ways of accumulation of all these wealth takes place through corrupt and unjust practices. It is the desire for *mammona* that breeds and promotes corruption. There is no corruption in the absence of *mammona*. There is corruption both within and without a person, in different institutions and society.

The experience of *mammona* brings evil in the form of division, death and destruction among people. In contrast, the Abba experience gives people life, brings them in solidarity, allows them to share all that they have with others, filling them with joy, happiness and

fulfilment. Jesus clearly pointed out that one cannot serve two masters, God and mammon (Mt 6:24). No one can love both. One can love only one of them – either the Reign of God or the Reign of *mammona*. Jesus in all his ministries made an all out attack on *mammona* and brought life to people life in abundance.

Is money in itself bad? Every human being needs a certain amount of money for the very survival and well being. But the problem begins when a person amasses more wealth than he or she really needs. A person can amass wealth without paying a just wage to workers. A person or a group of persons who are duly paid for their services either by the Government or by private firms, invent ways to force people to pay more money to get things done for them. Sometimes people say that in order to buy a travel ticket, they are forced to pay double or triple the amount of it. Any such process of amassing wealth takes place through a process of doing injustice to neighbours.

Human greed is the basis for unjust way of amassing wealth. It is not only individual greed, it is often institutionalised greed that gives birth to capitalism, feudalism and oppression of all kinds dividing the society, the rich, the middle class, the poor and the oppressed. Thus *mammona* is a social sin as it creates division among God's children as high and low, rich and poor, master and slave, literate and illiterate, educated and ignorant, oppressor and oppressed.

6. The Reign of God and Insights to Overcome Corruption

6.1. Insights from Jesus – Zacchaeus Encounter

In the story of Zacchaeus, we are told that he was a chief tax collector and was rich. When Jesus expressed his desire to him to stay at his house, he was happy to welcome him but the people commented that Jesus had gone to be the guest of one who was a sinner. The people might have been right in their judgement. But Jesus had come not to judge but to “seek out and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10).

God's salvation came to him, from the very moment when he expressed his willingness to be freed from all forms of corruption. Zacchaeus had amassed wealth through various corrupt practices. As he was after *mammona*, he was against God. He could not serve both God and mammon. In the process of accumulation of wealth he had oppressed the poor and offended God.

Making humans poor is a process in which three kinds of alienation take place in a society. The first is an alienation with one's neighbour who are the poor and the oppressed. The second is an alienation with one's God. The third is an alienation with oneself as one continues to

live in a way that does not allow the process of God's salvation to take place within oneself.

What happened to Zacchaeus in the very presence of Jesus? Jesus had not even made any mention of the way in which he had amassed wealth, neither had Jesus told him that he had cheated the poor and defrauded people. But in the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus became aware that he had been corrupt by cheating the poor and defrauding people. He might have heard the values of the Reign of God which were preached and practised by Jesus in support of the poor⁹ and worked against the rich. Therefore he decided spontaneously to become sincere and honest before Jesus.

A life of honesty is opposed to a life of corruption. It was a metanoia born of God's grace that enabled Zacchaeus to overcome all the three kinds of alienations that were born out of corruption of sin. It was a positive, spiritual and psychological healing filling him with the saving spirit of God who inspired him to say to Jesus: "Look half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much (Lk 19:9).

Do we draw any insight from the story of Zacchaeus to overcome corruption in India? Can any encounter like that of Jesus with Zacchaeus happen again and again in India which after all is part of the same Asian continent? Can the process that took place in the heart of Zacchaeus be the sure and definite way to eradicate corruption in India?

Religions true to their names have not only to teach their followers the meaning of life and what happens after life, but also have to tell them what is wrong with them, with the society and with the world, and correct¹⁰ them from the three kinds of alienations born of sin of corruption and show them the way to overcome their sinful ways and practices. Such a reflection implies that all the religious leaders who are responsible for guiding different groups of people in India must first cleanse themselves and then their people from all kinds of

⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV*, A new Translation with Introduction and Commentary, New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1222: Zacchaeus "is presented in this episode as an exemplary rich person who has understood something of Jesus' ministry and message and concern for the poor and the cheated."

¹⁰ A. Alangaram, *Christ of the Asian Peoples, Towards an Asian Contextual Christology, based on the documents of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, Second Revised Edition, Bangalore: Asian Tradition Corporation, 2001, 46: Here the author shares the view of Paul F. Knitter that what is more relevant today is that all the religions have to do with changing the world for the better.

practices of corruption. It is therefore important today that all believers need a socio-cultural analysis for a prophetic preaching and involvement in the society in order to renew themselves and rebuild the nation.

Since India is a cradle of many religions, a continuous interreligious dialogue on corruption and its evil consequences on our people would conscientize both our societal leaders and people. This will make it possible the Jesus-Zacchaeus encounter happen again and again in India. As we have many Zacchaeuses, we need many such encounters like that of Jesus. Religions have a serious responsibility to guide people radically to move from the culture of darkness to the culture of light, from the culture of death to the culture of life, from the culture of hypocrisy to the culture of honesty and from the culture of corrupt way of amassing wealth to just way of sharing. Such a prophetic radical approach of religions will without any doubt provide the needed opportunities of metanoia to all citizens¹¹ enabling them to decide to be honest, sincere and open to create a corruption free life in India.

6.2. Insights from Jesus paying Tax

During the time of Jesus the Jews lived under double taxation. They had to pay tax to the temple and to the Roman Government. Paying a tax to a foreign ruler or a Government was an expression of submission and slavery which the Jews hated. In addition, the system of double taxation was too much for them to bear. In the Gospel of Mathew there are two occasions where Jesus had been questioned by the collectors of tax and the religious and political authorities whether or not to pay tax both to the Temple and to the Roman Government.

In Mathew "... the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, "'Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?' He said, 'Yes he does'" (17:24-25). A little later, Jesus did ask Peter to pay the temple tax both for him and for Peter (17:27). In another occasion, the disciples of the Pharisees came with the Herodians to Jesus to trap him: "Tell us, then what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (22:17). Jesus was fully aware of their cunningness and the trap. If he had said, yes, he would have been supporting the Roman oppression

¹¹ Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1997, 141: "... a society will only be held together by an ethic and achieve a shift towards more reflectiveness, commitment and responsibility if people have the feeling that the ethical norms and criteria, particularly if they are put forward by religions and churches...".

and slavery which most of the Jews did not like, and if he had said, no, then he would have been accused of treason and would have been arrested immediately by the Herodians. But Jesus gave them a very interesting and unexpected answer: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" (22:21).

On both occasions, Jesus was in favour of paying tax.¹² But on the second occasion, he made it clear that there was yet another tax due to God which none of the tax collectors was aware of, nor thought of. The tax to God is nothing but the service to God and his Reign. In other words whatever has been collected in the name of tax has a special function not only to help the Government to maintain its political system and law and order, but also mainly so to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

Whatever goes against the poor is against the Reign of God. The very purpose of taxation is to bring equality, justice and peace in a human society, namely, those who have more income, more wealth and property than others pay more tax to the Government, so that the Government may spend the tax money on the poor and the needy in terms of free education and other basic necessities of life. Such a just sharing with the poor and oppressed provides them equal opportunity to come up in life and become self sufficient and independent in life.

As John the Baptist replied to the tax collectors, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you" (Lk 3:13), care should be taken to avoid corruption in collecting tax. When the system of taxation becomes corrupt, it gives way to tax evasion, illegal way of paying less tax or no tax at all, or to make delay in tax payment, or less transparency of income and wealth and as a result paying less tax or no tax. All those illegal practices affect the lives of the poor and therefore they are against the Reign of God. God's Reign will come in our midst only when the taxes are truly and justly paid and the tax money spent on those who are poor and oppressed for their welfare and wellbeing.

¹² Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, Matthew 14-28*, USA: Word Books, 1995, 510: "The periscope contains important theological teaching as well as a practical principle that transcends the setting in which it was originally articulated. It is, furthermore, of importance to Matthew to continue to press his argument about the loyalty of the Jesus of history to fundamental Jewish realities such as the law and the temple."

We are able to understand the positive response of Jesus in paying tax only in terms of its positive effects on the poor who with such helps, move from the periphery to the centre of a society and form the centre of the Reign of God. It was to the poor that Jesus had first promised the Reign of God.

The accumulated wealth in the hands of the few rich belongs to the poor, because the capital grows and multiplies only through human labour. When the rich do not pay a just wage and when they refuse to share a just portion of their profit to the working class, the capitalists become richer and the workers poorer. Such a process needs to be constantly watched, monitored and controlled by a Government in taxing the rich, who are well off, showing year after year more income, more wealth and property in their personal and family names and educating and employing the poor to lead a life with human dignity.

6.3. Insights from Jesus: A three-pronged Attack on the Evil

6.3.1. The first attack on the Evil of hardness of heart

The Reign of God was born wherever and whenever Jesus attacked the evil and overcame it. Hardness of heart in humans is the creation of the Evil. Selfishness, indifference to the suffering of others, personal or communal refusal to come forward in removing the suffering of individuals and society are some expression of the hardness of heart. Hardness of heart is the corruption of the heart. Persons with hardness of heart neither will promote life for others nor allow others to do them.

The Evil develops such a hardness of heart in humans that they themselves would not move a finger to help others in their suffering. Hardness of heart is a complete refusal of individual conversion and societal transformation. It is an option made by a person or a group of persons to maintain the status quo, however oppressive, inhuman and corrupt it may be.

Such a situation is a definite “No” to God and a definite closure to the values of God’s Reign. We find a similar situation in the Gospel of Mark, Ch 3:1-6, where Jesus got angry seeing the hardness of heart of Pharisees and Herodians who claimed that they were the custodians of law and order of the time but never bothered about creating a society of equality based on justice and peace.

Today, we have individuals and groups of persons with hardness of heart. They are economically and politically powerful in our country, who will not opt for a corruption free society. What we need to learn

from Jesus in order to overcome the evil of hardness of heart is that we need to bring the poor from the periphery to the centre and heal their withered lives through the process of creating a corruption free society where the poor are conscientized, and receive life, a life in abundance.

6.3.2. The Second Attack on the Evil of Refusal to Accept the Cross as the Way to Liberation

When Jesus revealed to his disciples that in the process of working for the Reign of God he had to “undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Mt 16: 21), Peter refused to accept a suffering messiah. The refusal to accept suffering and the cross for the cause of the Reign of God is from the Evil one. Jesus attacked such evil in the mind of Peter, saying: “Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Mt 16: 23).

It is a challenging and tedious task to bring about a corruption free society, because many who encourage corruption and live by it will be sure to oppose those who work for a corruption free society. Therefore such a mission, needless to say is bound to bring suffering and even death. All those who are convinced to transform the Indian society, or the Asian continent or even the whole world, cannot think of any other option but Jesus¹³ who died on the cross.

6.3.3. The Third Attack on the Evil of Sicknesses

Yet another evil that Jesus attacked was that which bound people with all kinds of sicknesses. Sickness is a revelation of the presence of Evil. Sickness is the outcome of the Evil being practised in a society. Corruption is one such evil. Corruption affects the poor in two ways. On the one hand the poor will not be able to bribe the Government officials and the politicians and come up in life and on the other hand the practice of corruption does not allow the money to go to the Government, so that it can use the tax money for the development of the poor. As they suffer from both ways, the poor do not have enough of food, clothing and shelter. As a result, they are the victims of malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment and all kinds of sicknesses.

¹³ A. Alangaram, *Religions for Societal Transformation, Interreligious Dialogue from Subaltern Perspectives*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2006, 145: All of us know that “... the path of liberation and transformation is a path of bloodshed and death. This path is echoed in the Gospel of John, 12:24. Thus the laying down of one’s own life will be the ground upon which hundreds and thousands of flowers of liberation will bloom and bear fruit.”

Thus we understand that corruption in a society makes both individuals and society sick psychologically, spiritually and physically. It is therefore people's responsibility to heal the society by ridding it of all corruption.

7. A Corruption Free Society and the Coming of the Reign of God

The Reign of God speaks to the human heart, revealing how human life has to be lived according to the plan of God. It begins with an inner revolution, a total conversion of the heart, which has to be seen in every human relationship and the way in which every human community is formed, developed and shaped: "It is the gospel that restores correct relationships between God and human beings, and between human beings that results in social justice where love and forgiveness become the norm of relationship."¹⁴ Thus the Reign of God not only implies individual conversion, but also the total transformation¹⁵ of every human, community, nation and the world.

Thus, in the context of corruption and injustice in India, making clear the understanding of the Reign of God which has the Abba experience as its foundation, directing every attack on *mammona* and all its manifestations, using all the insights from the Gospel of Jesus and his encounters with the Evil and corrupt individuals and society, Christians are invited, in collaboration with different Churches and religions in India, to make a new plan for all their ministries. The new plan needs to gear every ministry towards the creation of a corruption free society and a corruption free Church. It is truly a new way of evangelisation and a new way of bringing God's Reign in our midst.

The churches in India have not yet established a strong secretariat or a separate institution which can coordinate all their plans and works to create a corruption free India. However, in the recent past, we should appreciate the solidarity expressed to Anna Hazare by the Arch Bishop of Delhi, Most Rev. Vincent Concessao, some religious priests, brothers, sisters and other members of the Churches. This article is also an invitation to all the Churches in India to come together and plan and act together in creating a corruption free India.

¹⁴ Hrangkhuma F, "Mission and the Kingdom of God in the Synoptics," in *Bible and Mission in India Today*, ed. Hrangkhuma., et al., Bombay: St. Pauls, 1993, 111.

¹⁵ Levi Oracion, "A New Understanding of People" *CTC Bulletin*, VII (January-August 1987) 16: "God irrupts into the brokenness of human history not merely to judge the unjust and give justice to their victims, but to introduce a process of transformation that brings about genuine repentance, renewal and transformation."

8. Points for Prayer, Planning and Action

1. Creating zero-tolerance for corruption.
2. Creating awareness among the poor and general public on how to combat the menace of corruption.
3. Sanitizing the political climate.
4. Encouraging public watch groups.
5. Framing stringent laws to punish the culprits.
6. Regulating the unethical lobbying done by Multi National Corporations and other big corporate houses.
7. Encouraging transparency and openness at all levels of life in the society.
8. Giving more teeth to the RTI (Right To Information Act) and other related laws.
9. Providing more space for public debate and discussions on corruption.
10. Creating enough ambiance of fairness and justice.
11. Organizing the youth, conscientizing them to fight against corruption at all levels.
12. Encouraging people's movements to create a corruption free society.